WITH ROGERS' RANGERS

G·WALDO·BROWNE

WOODRANGER TALES

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WITH ROGERS' RANGERS

THE WOODRANGER TALES

BY

G. WALDO BROWNE

THE WOODRANGER
THE YOUNG GUNBEARER
THE HERO OF THE HILLS
WITH ROGERS' RANGERS

L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
New England Building
BOSTON, . . . MASS.

"'STEER FOR THAT ROCK SHELF A LITTLE TO YOUR RIGHT.'"

(*See page 83*)

WITH ROGERS' RANGERS

BY

G. WALDO BROWNE

AUTHOR OF
"THE WOODRANGER," "THE YOUNG GUN-BEARER," "THE HERO OF THE HILLS," ETC.

Illustrated by
L. J. BRIDGMAN

BOSTON
L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
1906

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TO

MY YOUNG FRIEND

Harold Edward Fife

THIS TALE "WITH ROGERS' RANGERS"

IS SINCERELY INSCRIBED

FOREWORD

THE war between the English colonists in New England and New York and the French of New France, now Canada, with their allies, the Indians, forms a period of momentous interest in the early history of our country. It really meant more than the conquest of the native warriors of the American wilderness, for it was the settlement of a quarrel of long standing between the powers in Europe. Had the French been successful here, England would have lost her hold on this continent. That she did not succeed was due more to the hardy band of woodrangers commanded by Rogers and the Starks than to the regular soldiery furnished by the mother country.

By virtue of discovery, the English claimed all of the territory upon the Atlantic coast from Acadia to Florida; and, through vesture of certain grants from the British Crown, all of the region westward to the Pacific Ocean. Their settlements consisted mainly of an irregular chain of towns along the eastern seacoast, numbering about a million and a half of people.

The French, on the other hand, claimed by exploration and occupation all of the valley of the St. Lawrence from the gulf by that name to an indefinite West, and northward to an equally uncertain boundary. They claimed the State of Maine in New England, New York State, the region about the Great Lakes, and the valleys of the Ohio and the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. They numbered barely one hundred thousand inhabitants.

To maintain her claims, France had erected a cordon of fortified outposts and armed missions extending across the unmapped country from its two extremes. The most noteworthy of these fortifications were Louisburg upon the Island of Cape Breton, Quebec, Three Rivers, and Montreal upon the St. Lawrence, Crown Point and Ticonderoga at the head of Lake Champlain, Fort Frontenac at the outlet of Lake Ontario, Niagara at its head, and Detroit midway between Lakes Huron and Erie, the key to the West.

Roaming among the French on the north and the English on the south were the fragmentary bands of Amerindians, shadows of the dusky people that once held domain over this broad country. These naturally did not unitedly espouse either side of these invading enemies. The Iroquois, in New York, for the most part, lent their aid to the English, while their bitter rivals, the Hurons and Al-

gonquins, quite as stoutly joined the French. In New England the English found now and then some son of the scattered tribes that linked his fortune with them. A marked example of this kind was the case of Philip, the Sokokis chief, whose father, Paugus the Oak, had been an intense hater of the whites. But Philip had been too young at the time of the overthrow of his father to receive any of his teachings. The Sokokis did not take kindly to the ways of the French missionaries.

War with the American Indians contained an element of far greater romance than modern warfare possibly could. The pages of American history do not show a company of troops more famous than "Rogers' Rangers." Their life was one of constant exposure, and their story reminds one of the days of romance, while the account of their daily hardships and perilous wanderings, their strange adventures and hairbreadth escapes, would be as thrilling and wild as a German legend.

One of the historians of the region where they acted their important part, and often were the forlorn hope of the British regulars, has most aptly and eloquently written:

"There is hardly a spot, either on land or water, that has not been the scene of some warlike exploit or heroic adventure. This region, forming in colonial times a part of the great highway between

Canada and New York, was often the chosen battle-ground of the French and English, who, in connection with hostile Indian tribes, waged a barbarous war on each other. Often was the lake traversed by the soldier, the savage, and the monk. Hither came the brave Montcalm, the pious Father Joques, the good Roubaud, Rigaud, St. Ours, and Courcelles, together with Abercrombie, Howe, Lord Amherst, Putnam, Rogers the Ranger, Johnson, Williams, 'King Hendrik,' Stark, and a multitude of others who are invested with historic renown. The story of their deeds contains all of the elements of romance."

G. WALDO BROWNE.

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WITH ROGERS' RANGERS

CHAPTER I.

THE TREE OF THE DEAD

HAD the Old Man of the Mountains,[1] upon that particular August afternoon, in the year of our Lord 1754, been the possessor of one of the watches of the old style English make then found among the colonists of New England, its hands would have pointed exactly to the hour of four, as a little party of scouts silently threaded the dim aisle of the primeval forest of that region. That the four moving single file, after the manner of some dusky sons of the war-trail, were adepts in this form of woodcraft was shown by the fact that they left behind them no greater evidence of their progress than was to be seen in the pathless trail ahead. Nor was this

[1] A rugged height in the heart of the Franconia group of the White Mountains whose serrated crest presents so accurately the features of the human countenance that it is known as "Profile Mountain." — AUTHOR.

any cause for wonder when it is told that every member of the party had passed his entire life upon the frontier of northern New England, which for more than fifty years had been the scene of border warfare, often in its most bitter form.

The leader of the party was a young man of twenty-six years, who possessed a sturdy figure. He was six feet in his moccasins, with not a pound of surplus flesh, but built up of bone, muscle, and sinew made by almost constant service in scouting, hunting, and roaming that wilderness whose secrets he had mastered as a boy. Not only had he grappled with the bear and stalked the panther in its lair, but he had also wrestled with Kankamus, the Indian "lion of the north," won a foot-race in a trial with Nolka, the lightfoot of the Ameriscoggins, and fought hand to hand in a death-struggle with Wivurna, the "oak of the St. Francis;" so his prowess was as well known among the Indian tribes as among his countrymen.

From time to time, being upon friendly terms with many of the red men, he had hunted and fished with them and followed the war-trail of the enemy, until he had become as proficient in the arts and artifices of forest warfare as even their most cunning warrior. Thus he had become their most dreaded foe and most highly admired friend. His name was Robert Rogers.

Next to him went a young man one year his senior, and every way worthy to be his companion. While Rogers was slightly over six feet in height, he was a little under that figure, and a few pounds lighter in weight. If he lacked a little in strength, he made this up in alertness of action and quickness of perception. With a profusion of dark brown hair inclined to curl, deep blue eyes which at times, when his passionate nature awakened to its possibilities, became almost black, an aquiline nose, thin, arching lips that denoted a sensitive temperament, rosy cheeks, and clean-shaven face, his was a handsome countenance.

He, too, had seen his share of life in camp and on the trail, and had become a keen student of nature thoroughly versed in forest lore. His name was William Stark, and he was a son of Archibald Stark, "Old Archie" of one of the lower settlements known as "Amoskeag Falls." This family was a noted one in the early history of northern New England.

Close upon the heels of William Stark followed the third member of this party, and, if he walked upon four feet, he was not a whit less worthy of mention. He was a large, keen-scented, swift-footed wolf-dog, whose fine appearance and good qualities were aptly expressed in his name, "Sergeant Beau de Bien," "the handsome and honest

sergeant." His proper name, it will be observed, was French, which was accounted for by the fact that young Stark, while upon a hunting trip into the north, had found him in the ownership of a French officer, who was beating him severely for some fancied shortcoming. Stark's impetuous love for all abused creatures was instantly aroused, and he interfered in the poor dog's behalf. The result was a fiery resentment on the part of the officer, followed by a duel, in which Stark was victor. In appreciation for this timely friendship, the dog gladly accompanied his new-found defender; and, from that day to his death, he was the one faithful follower who never betrayed his master or weakened in his love for him. His name was shortened by the English into Beaubien, while he was most generally known as "The Sergeant."

Last but not least in those qualities which made of the members of this little party three of the best and most successful scouts and Indian fighters of that trying period of frontier warfare was John Stark, a brother of William, and two years his junior. It was he who in later years became the hero of Bennington. Upon the eve of battle, with the British forces in sight, he turned to his brave followers, exclaiming:

"We must whip the redcoats to-day, or Mollie Stark sleeps a widow to-night." He was of medium

height, with a well-knit frame which had been seasoned and toughened, as his companions had been, by many trying experiences both on the hunt of wild beasts and the equally exciting war-trail of an enemy that never seemed to sleep.

All three were dressed in the favourite suit of the woodsman of that day, — small-clothes made of the coarse cloth spun at home and covered with buckskin leggings and hunting-shirt or sort of tunic, both garments frilled and ornamented in a fantastic manner with edgings of the same material and porcupine quills. Their feet were encased in moccasins of Indian pattern, while their heads were protected with the oft-described coonskin caps of that day.

Each scout, excepting, of course, the Sergeant, who was as much of a scout as any of them, was armed with one of the heavy muskets looked upon as man's most trusty companion, though they were poor weapons of defence when compared to the rifles of the present time. About their rugged bodies were girthed strong belts from which were suspended stout, serviceable knives and hatchets. Over their shoulders were hung two sashes, crossing each other upon the back and breast, carrying bullet-pouches, powder-horns, wipers, and pickers for their firearms and steel for striking fire.

In the midst of the silent advance of this quartette of scouts, Rogers paused to peer ahead through

an opening in the forest, while his companions also came to a standstill, waiting patiently for their leader to explain the meaning of his abrupt halt.

"There is the pine just round that broken-topped maple," said he, in a low tone. "I can see the upper branches of the old tree plainly. I should know it among a thousand on account of its wide-spreading branches. Growing upon a slight elevation, it has overpowered others until it covers more territory than pines usually do. It should have been an oak. The Woodranger marked the tree well as a landmark easily distinguished."

"I hope the old man will be on hand promptly," remarked William Stark.

"When did you ever know him to fail?"

"Never. But there must be a last time, when he will fail. I think you said it had been a full year since you and he parted, to meet here to-day."

"Yes, a full twelve months to an hour. We had been further north, upon the trail of an old bull moose which had run us hard for two days. We followed the old fellow more for sport than desire to capture him. I must say I admired his grit, if I do not our judgment. I went from here straight home, as the arrow flies, but I could not persuade the Woodranger to go with me. He seemed uncommonly nervous that day, and declared he must 'perambulate' westward. After some

coaxing on my part, he suggested that we meet here just one year from that hour. I gladly gave my consent, and so we parted. I have not seen or heard from him since."

"If I am not mistaken, you said Philip, the son of Paugus, was to be here, too," said John Stark.

"Yes, Philip was with the Woodranger and me, and he promised, as he started to go back to his people at the headwaters of the Connecticut, that he would come here at the same time. I have not seen him since that afternoon."

"Philip will not forget his promise," declared the younger Stark. "I would trust Philip with my life, though he is an Indian, and a Sokokis at that."

Rogers made no reply to this. In fact, his attention was suddenly taken up by the singular action of the Sergeant, who had begun to sniff the air in a mysterious manner, while he looked earnestly into the face of his master.

"Anything wrong, Sergeant?"

The intelligent creature wagged his tail, though he did not cease to give utterance to faint moans, while he continued to keep his nose high in the air.

"That means something unusual," said William Stark. "There are reds prowling about, or I do not know a beaver from a wildcat. Be still, old boy, and we will solve the mystery in a trice."

Rogers now resumed his advance, followed by

his companions with increased anxiety if not caution, for the latter was hardly possible. The Sergeant now glided ahead of the men, and quickly disappeared in the thick undergrowth ahead. William Stark was fain to wait for the return of the dog, but the more impetuous Rogers pushed his way swiftly, but silently, forward.

In the course of a few minutes he again came to a standstill, and, parting the matted ground hemlock that blocked his path, he looked at short range upon the tree which had been selected as the meeting-place for himself and friends after a year's separation. His inaction was almost immediately followed by a low exclamation of surprise, which was an unusual display of weakness for him.

"Look there, boys! What does that mean?"

The Stark brothers lost no time in obtaining a view of the scene thus opened to them, when both shrank back with feelings akin to horror. Sergeant had stopped directly under the low branches of the pines, and, resting upon his haunches, was gazing intently upward into the dark green foliage overhead.

The sight which now held the gaze of the scouts was that of three human figures suspended, side by side, from one of the lower branches of the pine, which creaked and groaned ominously, as it swayed pendulum-like beneath the weight of its ghastly

burden. Something of the hideousness of the scene was relieved by shrouds of birch bark and bear-skins bound carefully about the lifeless forms, but the effect was such as to produce feelings of painful emotions even to the scouts, as used as they had become to spectacles of savage life.

"Injuns!" exclaimed Rogers, sententiously.

"Cohas at that," declared John Stark.

"Must be some of the red wretches Baker killed in his foray," said William.

"Be that so or not, I hail it as a bad omen. The old pine has become the tree of the dead. Ha! some one is coming."

Sergeant had suddenly become uneasy again, turning from the sight of the dead Indians hanging from the pine to look fixedly into the forest below them. The long firearm of Robert Rogers swiftly dropped into the hollow of his left arm, while the fingers of his right hand rested on the stock of the weapon over the trigger. His companions were as quick to place themselves upon the defensive as he, and thus the four watched and waited the approach of some one whose footsteps had not yet fallen on their ears, and whose near presence had been foretold only by the keen sense of the faithful dog.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCOUTS' TRYST

THE suspense experienced by the scouts was not of long duration, for there quickly stepped from the shadows of the growth into plain sight one whose appearance was to instantly change the aspect of the entire attitude of the four silently waiting for him.

The newcomer was a typical son of the forest, an Indian tall and straight as an arrow, with rounded head and prominent aquiline nose. The general outline of his features was triangular, the mouth was rather large and straight, the eyes very black, the brows scanty, the cheeks high, the neck long, the chest broad but not deep like that of a well-formed white man, while the body and limbs were uncommonly thick and muscular for one of his race.

In the matter of dress, it was evident he had accepted in a marked degree the ideas of the English, since he wore his garb girthed closely about his body instead of wearing it loosely, as his ancestors had done when the national costume was made

of bearskin robes. His nether limbs were encased in pantaloons of tanned buckskin, whose yellow hue had become heightened in the process. Falling down over these from the shoulders he wore that garment so common among the frontiersmen, known as the hunting-shirt, and which became this Roman of the wilderness with as striking effect as did the toga of some patrician noble of the Imperial City upon the banks of the Tiber. The seams of the garments were tied with narrow strips of deer thong instead of being sewed like those of the white scouts, seeming more appropriate and lending a certain picturesque result to the whole. Moccasins made by the skilful fingers of some dusky maid of his lodgment protected his feet. His head was uncovered, save for the mass of long, straight black hair and the solitary eagle feather which he wore as a memory of his fathers.

He was instantly recognized by the three men, all of whom exclaimed in the same breath:

"Philip!"

"Me come!" replied the Sokokis, tersely.

The sharp gaze of the red man had already swept the circumscribed scene, and his eyes had rested upon the bodies swaying from the pine. But the sight did not hold his attention long, for, turning away with a simple, guttural "hough!" he asked of Rogers:

"Where Taconica?"

"The Woodranger has not come yet," replied the young scout.

"I am afraid that for once he will fail to keep his promise," declared William Stark.

"It lacks a few minutes of the time he set," replied Rogers. "He said he would be here just as the shadow of that tall spruce fell upon the sharp rim of the cliff beyond."

His companions, even to Philip, distinguished the tree pointed out by him, and they saw that the shade lacked less than a hand's span of reaching the designated peak of rock.

"Well, it is mighty near the time," said William Stark. "I am getting anxious about him."

"See!" exclaimed Rogers, in the midst of the earnest watch suddenly begun by them. "The long arms of the spruce shade touch the pointed rock. The time is up when the Woodranger was to be here, and —"

"Aweel, now's me!" a voice broke upon the scene with a clearness and suddenness that caused the four men to wheel about with looks of surprise upon their sunburned features, "in all an ol' man's perambulations, he's ne'er seen critter, — an' he's not unmindful o' the timid fawn that is frightbound by the very danger it would fly from, — I say, I've ne'er seen critter so lost to discretion as ye,

lads, a moment since, and with th' brown-faces everywhere in ambushment for your scalp-locks. How long has it been since Rob Rogers and the sons o' Stark have come to think with their eyes an' blindfold their minds?"

While for a moment the young scouts stand agape with pleasurable wonder, let me hastily give an outline sketch of this newcomer, whose picturesque personality certainly deserved the portrayal of an artist. He was standing at the moment his words had arrested the attention of his friends within a few feet of them, his tall, erect figure as stationary as the trunk of a young sapling, while he leaned slightly upon the muzzle of his old-fashioned flint-lock musket reaching nearly to his shoulder as its butt rested upon the ground.

Counting life by its years, he was a little over fifty, but his abundant hair and beard, silvered with time's frosts, and the furrows upon his rugged features, weather-stained but beaming with honest simplicity, made him appear older. His garb was that of a woodsman, a pair of tight-fitting buckskin pantaloons, frilled up and down the seams, a hunting-frock of the colour of the green wood, fringed along the sleeves and around the bottom with yellow, and girthed closely about the waist by a wide belt, so the garment could not flutter as he moved through the forest. A cap made of the skin of the silver

fox, shorn of its fur for summer wear, with the long tail hanging down his shoulders, covered his head. Upon his feet he wore a pair of Indian moccasins, which were ornamented with porcupine quills.

The handle of a serviceable knife appeared above the rim of the belt, while a heavy pistol beside it, with the battle-scarred gun already mentioned as used now for temporary staff, completed his armament. A bullet-pouch and powder-horn, slung from his shoulders, with flint and tinder-box, picker and washer for his firearms, completed his accoutrements.

The silence with which he had thus suddenly appeared before the young scouts, and the shrewdness of having approached from the leeward, so as to escape the scent of the watchful Sergeant, were in keeping with his entire manner. He had passed thirty or more years of life in the wild wood, during which time he had wandered from the east into the unexplored regions of the far north and into the remote west, disappearing and reappearing with remarkable safety. At one time known as "Wiscowan, the Wanderer," anon as "Taconica, the Forester," then as "Gray Cliff, the Silent Foot," or as "Speaking Eye, the Dead Shot," he was more frequently called "Woodranger, the Father of Scouts."

A faint smile rested lightly upon his bearded lips, as he looked with peculiar interest upon his surprised friends. Philip, the young chief, was the first to speak, calling him by the name the Indians loved best:

"Taconica, Philip very glad to see the Silent Foot."

Rogers and the Stark brothers exclaimed in unison:

"The Woodranger!"

Then the four pressed forward to clasp, one by one, the hand of their long-missed companion.

"Ay, lads, it be well 'twere me when a handful o' brown-faces might have caught ye like rabbits in their burrows while ye gaped at the shadows and made a wanton waste o' discretion."

"Forgive us, Woodranger," implored Rogers, "if we did forget our caution in our anxiety for you. We had begun to think you would not come."

"Not come, lad?" asked the forester, with an inflection in his voice which showed that he was slightly injured by the doubt. "Do you expect the tree to blossom afore it buds? Did you expect me afore the finger o' the sun had p'inted the hour? I was here, lads, though I tuckered three moons in the perambulation. But I forgive thee, lads, as I forgive the years that add to my weakness."

To those who may think this meeting of the three

scouts in the wilderness with such complete accuracy was an unreasonable feat, it is only justice to say such performances were not uncommon in the days of the pioneers. More especially were they often undertaken among the Indians, and the red man never failed to keep his tryst unless death had interfered with the plans of man. There was an unfailing accuracy and surety of purpose in his methods of life which caused him to look upon such accomplishments as matter-of-fact incidents. The English had proved apt pupils in the arts of which they were masters.

"What cheer do you bring, Woodranger?" asked Rogers. "And tell us where you have kept yourself the last twelve months."

"As to the first, lad, which I count an open question, I do not previcate the truth when I say that the trail o' the races is crossed and crisscrossed with signs I dare not read aloud. There is a storm in the air, lads, I swan I believe there is."

Robert Rogers, more than his companions, was impressed by these words of the Woodranger, and, grasping his arm, he demanded:

"Tell me what you have seen and heard, Woodranger."

"It may not be much, lad; in itself I can see that it's little more than the whim o' an old man, but the froth on the water shows the way o' the current

quicker than the block o' wood that dams and does not seek freedom. The Frinchers are arming in the west. Already they have seized the little English habitation at the forks o' the Ohio, and have begun fortifications there.[1] This, I opine, is their first step on the war-trail o' conquest that shall make o' New England, New France. It be a bold, wanton trail that winds where innocent lives have cabined, and I, without the knack o' prophecy, can ne'er read sign to the end o' the beginning."

"Our success must depend largely on the help we get from the old country," declared William Stark.

"Mighty little we shall get there," said Robert Rogers, decidedly. "At any rate, of the kind we shall need in beating the bush of the red vultures."

"Aweel, lad," said the Woodranger, "the reds be playthings in the hands o' the Frinch. Nor are the British o'erkind to us. A convention has been called at Albany to trail a plan to unite the colonists in the war with France; but 'twill fall short o' its purpose, mark my words. There be too little interest in the mother country for her children, and too little o' the thought that brings 'em together. Like rivers that grow and strengthen by bringing their waters together, so must man find his par-

[1] Fort Du Quesne, where the city of Pittsburg, Pa., now stands. — AUTHOR.

fecting element in union and harmony. Ay, as Rob has said, I opine it's little help we'll get from the old country, and that not o' a helpful sort."

"Right, as usual, Woodranger. It therefore behoves us to organize and arm ourselves," declared Rogers, in his vehement and decisive manner, like one who was born to command. "We must truly depend on our own efforts, or we will become a part of New France as sure as yonder sun is sinking into the west."

"Ay, lad, now's me, you trail a thought that runs as straight as a mark on a frosty morn. The colonists in Northern New England must arm and be led to the scrimmage. An' you are the one to be the p'inting finger, and the voice as well. If I do say it, and, mind you, I lay no claim to undue knack in unravelling the skein o' human conceit, you have shown uncommon cunning in picking up the ways and means o' the brown-faced warriors on whom the Frinch are depending so much."

"Not I, Woodranger, but you. It has been you who have taught me the little woodcraft I have gained. It is true I have picked up a passable knowledge of the Indian tongue, and can talk so a Frenchman will understand me. But there is no person in my range of observation, and I have been in about every corner of New England and New France, who is so well versed in forest lore, and —"

"Tut, tut, lad! Now you show a vain weakness, such as does not belong by natur', and natur' is man's better part, to a Rogers. I say this without dissembling, for no man has a better proof o' the sign than I, who has trailed with you from a boy, and who perambulated with your father in the red days o' Lovewell. It may have been for me to touch elbows with you in some o' the mysteries that abound in the hidden haunts o' the wildwood, but, if you have unravelled a knot in the skein from any word or sign I may have dropped, it was only the giving o' a father to his child. I can make no boast o' it. An ol' man's counsel may be well when the powder be dry, lad, but, if there be damp in the combustible, there be need o' the fire o' youth to set the grain a-ripening. The English powder be wet, lad, and the follies o' man hang like fog over it. The end no man can read, lest he be varsed in deeper than book l'arning, which I am free to own is a lost craft to me. It be a crucial day, lads, I swan I believe it, I do."

His companions listened with respectful silence to this genius of the solitude, the one person who had been, in truth, the tutor of Robert Rogers and his friends in the arts of woodcraft longer than they could remember, until he finished his modest speech. When he had finished, Rogers asked:

"Do you think the Hurons are solid with the French, Woodranger?"

"As solid as a red wall may be built, lad, and the Hurons be bad Injuns, for they fight with a wanton waste o' discretion and fairness. But the sky may be clearer in the east. You know I have been perambulating for a goodish time about the great waters."

"The sky is no clearer in the east, Woodranger, than you have shown it to be in the west. Within a month rumour has come to the lower settlements that the French have dared to raise a fort within our own province, and we are now under the command of Captain Powers, who, with his men, is awaiting us in the valley below here, to go to the intervales of Coos to see if report has lied or not. Only a short time ago, Captain Baker, while upon a trip of exploration into this region, ran across a party of Indians scouting under French orders, and carrying the torch of desolation to the homes of New England. These red devils hanging here on the death tree speak in no unmistakable manner of Captain Baker's work.

"It means the slavery or the freedom of the New England colonists. If we allow the French to gain a foothold within our borders, we are crippled, and will soon be made helpless. I, for one, would fain bid them defiance, even if that means

another war. In fact, we cannot hope for peace from the red men so long as the French are allowed to set them upon us like so many dogs. But when the war comes, as it is sure to come, mark my words, it will be the men of the Merrimack Valley who will have to bear the brunt of the battle. But let it come, the sooner the better for me!"

The somewhat fiery young Rogers had barely finished his impassioned speech, when William Stark exclaimed:

"Good for you, Rob!" extending his right hand as he spoke, "and here is one who will be with you."

The Sergeant looked up with apparent approval, wagging his tail furiously.

"I am with you, too, Robert," said the less impulsive John Stark, though there was an equal determination in what he said.

The four white men now looked with one accord upon the dusky features of their friend Philip, the last of the Sokokis chiefs, and the youngest son of one of the most implacable enemies the colonists of New England had known all through their hundred years of Indian warfare. He was Paugus, slain by Lovewell's band in 1725, after the most desperate battle fought during all of that long and sanguinary war. Philip had been barely a year old at that time, when his father fell, and the few survivors of his tribes sought safety in hunting-grounds

to the north. Notwithstanding the traditions of his people, and all that they had suffered at the hands of the English, the young chief, upon reaching manhood, had scorned the overtures of the French and been friendly to the English. He now looked his companions squarely in the face, while he replied in his graphic language:

"Philip is too much of a warrior not to know his duty; too brave not to know his friends."

If this speech might suggest a boastful tone, there was nothing in the manner of the speaker to denote it. Rather there was a depth of sincerity and a directness of intention which pleased his companions, who voiced the sentiments of Rogers as he quickly declared:

"Good for you, Philip. I had no doubt of your faithful purpose, and I know we shall have no truer or braver ally than you."

Then, referring for the first time to the tree since the appearance of the forester, he continued:

"What do you think of that sign, Woodranger? I see that one of the dead men was old Hatchet-Face, with whom I once had a tilt."

"I was minding that, lad, I swan I was. We can afford to let last year's leaf hang to the parent stem until the new shall blow. He did his work according to his gifts. To me there hangs over that tree the wraith o' distorted dreams, but they

may be no more than the fears o' an ol' man in his weakness, seeing sights that never were, and hearing sounds that were never trumpeted. But the brown-faces are surely on the war-trail. Their hatchets be sharpened; their bullets be run; their eyes be trained for second sight. Aweel, second sight it will be to many, and Mamelons![1] Now, lads, I'd fain know if there be any change at the settlement by broken waters."[2]

"You are going with us to see for yourself, Woodranger?" asked Rogers, by way of reply.

"Nay, lad, that may not be. There be many footprints to pick up, many crossings o' the trail to be unravelled, many a fallen leaf to be read, as you'd read the signs in your book, where the ol' man w'd fain perambulate. He may, and mind you, I say this without boasting, it may be he will stumble upon sign that shall let the light in upon this amazement o' war."

"But we want you with us, Woodranger," declared the young scouts, as with one voice.

"That tickles an ol' man's vanity, lads, I swan it does, and an ol' man's conceit, like memory, grows vainer with the years. Aweel, now's me, I will be with you as long as these ol' feet may carry

[1] "The place of the dead."—AUTHOR.

[2] Now known as Amoskeag Falls, about whose water-power has since grown up the manufacturing city of Manchester, N. H.—AUTHOR.

the burden imposed upon 'em. You've ne'er unravelled a knot in the skein consarning 'em who consort at the Falls, Mistress Stark and Old Archie, Cap'n Goffe, Archie McGamble, Squire Blanchard, and — and — and the lass, lads, the fairest flower in the flock. What of her?"

There was an uncommon eagerness in his tone, an anxious look in his eye, the others did not fail to notice, though Robert Rogers gave no indication of this in his reply:

"You mean Rilma MacDonald, Woodranger? Then you have not heard that she has gone into a home of her own? She and Archie Perham were married last Christmas, and they are living at Cohas Falls, contented and happy, I hear."

The rugged countenance of the forester instantly lighted, very much as a bit of sodded earth is suddenly freed of its shadows by the breaking of the sunbeams upon it. Then he exclaimed, in a voice vibrating and trembling with long-suppressed emotions:

"Sich tidings fall like moonbeams upon the dew-laden leaf that has been frost-bitten, I swan they do, lad. So the lass has found her mate, — some one to help bear the cross o' life, — joy with her in her laughter, join with her in her tears? Aweel, it be a goodish bit o' a story, lad, and it sets the clockwork o' this body humming. There be no

need now for me to perambulate o'er the ol' trail; nay, there be nothing to worrit the ol' man as he follers the setting sun, no looking back to read the sign. It be well — well, the web that should have been woven — the thread that should have been spun. It is natur', and natur' makes no mistakes. Say to the lass, Rob, if she should drop a hint o' him, that you see the ol' man; that he had yet the oak in his limbs, the spark o' humanity in his heart undimmed. I swan, come to think on't, for a man o' his years, — and I hope the Lord won't think it's vanity, — I — I mean, he ne'er has felt so rugged for twenty year, not since that morn in Glen Cory, when they tol' him — by the shivered horn o' the buck! where is this ol' tongue running now that it babbles like a brook that has broken its dam? S'prising how much foolishness one gets with strength. I s'pose one comes to balance t'other, jess as wisdom comes to help one out in their weakness. Say to the lass, lad, say to her, the ol' man looked peart and rugged for a man o' his years and cross; uncommon light o' spirit, if you may; but say no more — no more."

With these words the Woodranger turned away, as if he would leave his companions without further conversation, but Robert Rogers called him back.

"If you will not return home with us, Woodranger, you will at least go with us upon this ex-

pedition north? It will not take you from your course."

"Forgive the ol' man if he showed uncommon weakness. The storm will leave the tree it has been threshing weak, especially if that storm has been overlong. Ay, I should part with a sore heart did not I keep with you on this trail."

So Captain Powers's party was strengthened by the presence of the old scout. But the expedition availed nothing, except to prove that the enemy had not ventured into their country as yet. Still, there was an arming of forces already going on; new leaders of the French soldiery and their dusky allies coming to the front; so when next we meet our scouts, they are brought face to face with a foe that threatened their desolation.

CHAPTER III.

A FRIGHT AND A SURPRISE

It is in harmony with the purpose of life that the actors upon each stage of human progress should think that they were living during a period fraught with wonderful and rapid action in the development of affairs. So we of to-day think that there was never a period so filled with swift-moving events of vital importance to the welfare of the race. Had we lived in the days of our forefathers this would have been the same, for they felt deeply the earnestness and far-reaching purpose of their lives. This is the fuel that feeds the fires of patriotism.

Those who figure in this plain story of mine were certain that momentous events were shaping themselves under the touch of master hands into forms of danger or of safety. Swift-footed couriers were continually passing from place to place, carrying tidings of good cheer or of forebodings. And while the war-cloud gathered and darkened, lifting slowly above the horizon, the members of the little party of scouts, with the exception of the Wood-ranger, who had not been seen or heard of for

months, rallied their friends to combine against an enemy that threatened not only their liberty but their homes. Robert Rogers was the master spirit in this effort, and so well did he succeed that before another spring he had mustered about him a hundred kindred spirits ready to march to the scenes of war.

Fearing still a descent of the allied forces down the Connecticut Valley, the Governor of the Province of New Hampshire ordered Captain Rogers, as he had become known, to go with his men to Coos Valley and construct a fort. But Rogers' Rangers had barely started upon this expedition before the news spread over New England that the French were premeditating an attack upon the country along the old Indian war-trail between the valleys of the Hudson and the St. Lawrence Rivers, known as "the Grand Pass." This followed the Richelieu River up to Lake Champlain, and thence by that body of water to the "Narrows" at its head, and by the portage to the "River of the Mohawks," the Hudson. The British force under General Johnson was preparing to defend this war-trail, and word was sent for the New England men to join in the work. The hasty order to Rogers was carried to him in his Northern fastness by a youth named Benjamin Browne, who then joined Captain Rogers in a memorable march

through the wilderness of what is now the State of Vermont to a rendezvous at the lower end of what was then known as "the carrying-place" between the Hudson River and Lake Champlain. This was a little less than fifty miles above Albany, New York, and was known as Fort Lyman, later as Fort Edward.

General Johnson was in command of the English army, and he immediately sent for Captain Rogers to learn what he could of the enemies from the direction he had come. The result of this conference was an order for the Ranger chief to start upon a scout up the Hudson, while a smaller party was to make a similar trip to the French posts already springing up at the head of Lake Champlain.

The last squad was under the command of Lieutenant William Stark, who was accompanied by Benjamin Browne, a young man named Elijah Bitlock, and last, but not least in effective service, though not of the regular enrolment, the Woodranger and Sergeant Beau de Bien. The forester had joined the Rangers while they had been on their way to the scene of war, and his appearance had been hailed with joy by his friends.

So, near the close of the afternoon of the 7th of September, 1755, we find this little party of scouts moving with extreme caution along the nar-

row ravine running northward from a waterfall whose music was still ringing in their ears, but growing fainter and sweeter as they advanced. Low but rugged mountain ranges walled in the lonely, picturesque pathway, while in the near distance rose an eminence of greater height, which had been already designated "French Mountain."

In silence the little party moved along the pathway which has since become such an historic road, and where they were to act so important a part. Impressed, as they progressed, with the deep solemnity of the scene where man had not yet left the imprint of his hand, they noted that the mountains continued to draw nearer together, as if they, too, felt their loneliness.

"Aweel, lads," remarked the Woodranger, in his measured, sincere tone, "it may be only an ol' man's weakness, but I can feel the arms o' the Creator drawing around me. There be a grandness in the valleys, I am mindful, — a fitness to human life, which binds us with its own blindness, — but the mountains are the eyes o' the wilderness.

"Now from yon bald mountain, which I opine would call for some tall climbing, one might look down upon the trailing o' water which has given the plumed pagans nature's passway into her fairyland. In the west rise, like the backs of an army

of porcupines, the mountains o' the Five Nations o' dusky warriors. On the east, trending away to the north, loom the lazy hills o' the Horicans, who once held dominion here. But they had to give way to the Mohawks, as the Mohawks must in turn give way to the English." [1]

Both William Stark and Benjamin Browne showed that they were deeply impressed by the simple words of the forester, but the young man named Bitlock was not of a nature to be influenced by serious thoughts. Seeing at that moment a big boulder [2] which rested a little removed from the path they were following, he started toward it, exclaiming:

"B'gosh! there's a chance to see sumthin', and

[1] The Woodranger here refers to Black Mountain, beyond doubt, though this barren-topped height was several miles away. The waterway designated was composed of Lakes George and Champlain, while the Hudson could be seen in the distance. The mountains in the west were the Adirondacks, while those upon the other hand were the Green Mountains. There is ample proof to show that the first European explorers found a race of people called by other tribes as "the Horicans," who inhabited this region, and who suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from the scene as many another clan or tribe of Amerindians vanished from the hunting-grounds of their fathers during the eventful period of colonization by the white men. — AUTHOR.

[2] This was the same boulder Colonel Williams, it is claimed, was standing upon when he received his death-wound in the battle so soon to follow at this place, and it has since been made to become a monument to his memory, erected by the Alumni of Williams College. — AUTHOR.

there wus never a Bitlock yet who did not know enough to take his opportunities by the top-knot."

With these words, Lige Bitlock made a desperate lunge for the rough surface of the rock in question, and, his long limbs threshing the air, he quickly ascended to the summit. Then, with a continued beating of the invisible forces about him, he managed with greater difficulty to rise upright upon his perch.

"B'gosh! hyur's where ye git yer long-winded —"

But the speaker never explained just what he had in mind, for at that moment, with a piercing cry of terror, he toppled to one side, and went crashing down the boulder into the thicket of bushes growing at its base. As Lige fell upon the side opposite to his companions, they lost sight of him for the time, though his outcries continued to awake the silence of the scene with frightful harshness.

"The fool will arouse every Indian and Frenchman within a league of us, if there is one about!" exclaimed Stark, darting around the rock to order the frightened youth to stop his outcries. The Woodranger and young Browne remained in the path, curious watchers of the misadventure.

Lige had fallen nearly upon his back, and at full length, and when William Stark found him, he was

kicking the encircling bushes for all he was worth, and moaning and panting with pain and terror:

"Oh — oh — oh! I'm sp'iled! I'm sp'iled!"

"Quit your noise, Lige!" commanded Stark. "Don't you know we are in the enemy's country, and that every cry like that is sure to tell them of our presence?"

"I can't keep still, Mister Stark! I'm a dead man — a dead man!"

"I never knew a dead man to do quite so much hollering," replied Stark, smiling. "But it has got to stop at once. Quit, you fool! before I choke the wind out of you."

"I — I can't, Mister Stark! I — boo — hoo! I tell yer I'm a dead man! I've — I've —"

"What?" demanded Stark, with increasing earnestness.

"I — I — I fell inter a nest of rattlers! I'm bit an' pizened all over!"

"Out upon you for a fool now. I have seen no rattler, and there aren't any about the place now."

"There wus. One crawled right out'n my jacket, an' one wound right round my laig! He bited me, too, deep. How the blood runs down my ankle! Oh, I'm a goner — a goner!" and he groaned and struggled like one in great agony. So serious, indeed, did his case seem to be that Stark

became alarmed. While he had not seen any snakes, he was aware that one or more might have escaped before he had reached the place. Catching Lige by the shoulders, he dragged him quickly out into the path in order to get a better view of him.

Of course the others had heard the commotion, and understood its meaning, and they now hastened to the side of the sufferer.

"Oh — oh! this terrible war has been the end of me! How that laig jumps and stings! An' it's swelled to bu'st! This is orful — orful!"

Without speaking, the Woodranger stooped over, and quickly began to remove his pantaloons so he could examine the wound. Under his dextrous movements, this was the work of but a moment, when the bare flesh was exposed to the gaze of the anxious companions of Lige.

"Is it a bad bite, Woodranger?" asked Stark.

"It's cut like a knife clear to the bone, an' sort of turned cater-corner —"

"Stop your hollering like a loon that has been out all night!" said the Woodranger, with uncommon sternness for him, while he continued to examine the limb.

For the first time Lige Bitlock smothered his cries, but he trembled and shook like one with the ague, while he gasped:

"Has yit stopped bleed—"

"It never has bled," replied Stark, breaking in somewhat angrily.

"Not in the way we are apt to trail blood," remarked the forester, giving at the same time a sharp pinch about the flesh, which brought forth a howl of pain from Bitlock.

"There 'pear to be two pin-marks about half an inch apart," said the Woodranger, speaking in a low tone. "I see no wound that a rattler might have made, and yet the rattler be cur'ous in some o' its ways, like the reds. It may be, and then it may be not again. I durst not previcate the truth, — this be an amazing bite for a rattler."

With these words, leaving Lige to continue his groaning and writhing, the Woodranger approached the spot where he had fallen from the boulder. The bushes were trampled down, and at first he could find nothing to reward him for his search. If it had been a snake, it had swiftly disappeared. But, in the midst of his search, the scout heard a sharp, hissing noise issuing from the thicket close to the base of the rock.

A low chuckle came from the Woodranger, and, with a quick, strong movement of his right hand, he suddenly seized upon an object which fluttered, sputtered, and tried furiously to break from his grasp.

"There be your rattler!" declared the captor,

triumphantly, holding the struggling creature up at arm's length. "A purty bird, — a handsome quail, I swan, as e'er I trailed eyes on. She was ketched fast between two branches, like an ant between your fingers. But her bill was left free, and I opine she enjoyed that pinch o' the youngster's leg. Stop your bawling, younker, long enough to see that your rattler wears a feather cloak, and has no more pizen in her bite than a babe has in its teeth."

William Stark began to laugh heartily, while Lige looked first upon the Woodranger, and then upon the captive bird, unable to understand the situation. Slowly it seemed to dawn upon him that he may have been mistaken, and he managed to exclaim:

"Did — did — did that creeture bite me?"

"That was the rattler, according to my way o' reading the sign," replied the Woodranger.

"Where did the snaiks go?"

"Into your moccasins, perhaps," said William Stark, who was still laughing and enjoying the affair.

With an ear-splitting yell, Lige leaped to his feet, and began to dance about like an Indian. Just what he would have done cannot be told, for at this juncture the Woodranger dropped the quail, which gladly flew away into the growth, and, seiz-

ing hold of Bitlock, commanded him to be silent. At the same moment the Sergeant uttered one of his low, warning growls, and, pricking up his ears, he stepped lightly in the direction of the woods upon their left.

"Injuns!" exclaimed Ben Browne, quickly throwing back the hammer of his queen's arm musket,[1] when a motion from Stark caused him to desist from all movement.

[1] I have the battered and shattered remnant of this gun now in my possession, and though it is past its usefulness, I would not like to part with the old relic. — AUTHOR.

CHAPTER IV.

INDIAN PLUME

In the midst of the Sergeant's swift and silent advance, a voice, with womanly sharpness in it, rang out from the clustered undergrowth near at hand, saying:

"Call off your dog, or I will shoot him! I come as a friend to the palefaces."

Sergeant heard and seemed to understand, for he instantly came to a standstill, pausing with one paw uplifted, while his dilated nostrils continued to scent the air. His eyes never left for a moment the space ahead, as light steps fell on the ears of the expectant group, until a bewildering, but beautiful, vision of womanhood burst upon their sight. With a low murmur, which seemed to speak of satisfaction mingled with an air of humiliation at the mistake he had made in looking for an enemy where apparently a friend had appeared, Sergeant retreated to the side of his master, where he became a silent, though interested, spectator of the scenes that followed.

The younger members of the scouts, even to

Lige Bitlock, who had suddenly ceased his groaning and struggling and become as interested as his companions, at first could not realize that they were thus unexpectedly confronted with a person whom they had not the most remote idea could have been within sight or sound of them. The stranger, who had paused beside the pathway, stood gazing upon them in modest defiance. She carried a lightweight firearm of the clumsy pattern of that day, which now rested in the hollow of her left arm, while she looked with flashing eyes upon the surprised whites.

This sprite of the wilderness could not have been twenty years of age, and, while too dark of skin to belong to the race of Europeans, she was not in feature a reproduction of the dusky people that inhabited these regions. Again, her garb was a compromise between the two races. A skirt of fawn's skin, light and durable, fell below her knees in graceful folds, ornamented with frills and tucks made of the same material. Below the bottom of this garment were to be seen leggings or pantalets of the same material, the seams frilled and decorated with clever imitations of the ivy vine and leaf, cut by the cunning hand of the maker. Her feet were encased in moccasins of skilful design in keeping with her picturesque attire. Her head was without a covering, except for the mass of

dark hair which hung in a single braid down her shoulders. Fastened to this upon the top of the head was a bright red flower, which showed with uncommon distinctness against its dark setting.

The Woodranger was the first to recover his presence of mind sufficiently to speak, his surprise was quickly overmastered, and he asked:

"Why comes here the maid who wears the Indian's flower of sorrow?"

"Indian Plume might ask the same of the white brother," said the other, with a soft, musical voice in which two tongues blended. "She could hear them call a long way off, but they were cries out of reason as well as out of place."

"Now you trail a true sign. 'Twas a wanton waste o' discretion. But man's wit flies out when fright flies in. Durst think the brown-faces are knocking about?"

"The Abnakis and their allies, the French, are just below here," pointing along the path as she spoke.

"Aweel, I opined as much. The Indian Plume has some errant, some token of peace or of war that has brought her here," declared the forester.

She started at this direct question, but answered, quickly:

"Indian Plume has a purpose in seeking the palefaces. She was on her way to the lake to look

after a canoe that has been afloat on the water for several hours. There seems to be some one in it. Palefaces go that way?"

"I cannot previcate the truth, Indian Plume," replied the Woodranger, saying aside to his companions:

"I ne'er think it will be an indiscretion if we follow the lass for a leetle while, seeing it be a trail that winds with us."

"You seem to know her, Woodranger," said Stark. "That, to me, is sufficient proof of her friendship."

"Now you jump like a mad buck ag'in a stump. I've heerd a goodish bit o' the lass, but this be the first time I e'er trailed sight on her. She be purty in her ways, but too dark for a white, and too light for a consort o' the brown-faced pagans. I've heerd there be the blood o' a Mohawk princess in her veins, and that o' an English father. It is not for me, a man with a cross, to jedge. Her features read like an open book, not that I am quick to pick up the signs o' the written page, and the neatness and fitness o' her garb bespeaks a purity of mind. There can ne'er be purity where there is no neatness, and there is no vanity where there is fitness. As I read the sign, we can trust the lass, but it be not overwell to lean too much on an ol' man's jedgment, especially when it be a woman."

While the forester was expressing his opinion to his companions, Indian Plume was gazing steadily down the pathway, and twice she moved forward, as if impatient to be going. Without further parley, the scouts signified their willingness to go with her, Lige Bitlock having suddenly forgotten his recent experiences, while he said in a low tone to Ben Browne:

"B'gosh! did ye ever see sich a purty gal? I calculate ye air glad I hollered to her."

Indian Plume led the way with light, rapid steps, which even the Woodranger found difficult to equal, so nothing was said by the four as they moved through the forest, whose long, dark arms bended so low as to touch their heads at times. But all were on the alert for danger, the impulsive Stark more than half-believing that they were likely to be led into an ambushment of Indians at any moment. The others, placing all their confidence in the forester, who appeared to have full confidence in their guide, merely maintained a careful watch, and looked curiously forward to the termination of the adventure.

At last the Woodranger, who was next to the mysterious maid, discovered the glimmer of water through the foliage ahead, which led him to remark:

"Look yon, lads, if you would see the rim o'

the Horican. I hail it as a good sign that the sun be throwing its changing bars of gold and silver across its bosom. Aweel, now's me, the sun can afford to give its best to this mirror o' waters, for it gets the best back. The pictur' o' an Indian squaw would look bright reflected here."

It needed not the words of the Woodranger to inform William Stark that they were drawing near to the shore of Lake George, as it was christened by the English commander out of respect to his king, for he had been in this vicinity before. This was the first time Ben Browne or Lige Bitlock had ever seen this famous sheet of water, though the first, at least, had heard of it.

As every schoolboy who loves his geography knows, Lake George lies at the head of the valley of the St. Lawrence River, a beautiful body of water about thirty-five miles in length and from three-fourths of a mile to four miles, and at one point eight miles, in width. It is, in fact, more like a river than a lake. It has a bed of white earth and gravel, now ground into a fine white sand of crystal purity. This fact, for one reason, caused the French to name it *Lac St. Sacrament,* a name highly in keeping with its natural beauty and purity. It had been known among the aborigines of this highly favoured country as *Wandiataroctah,* which in English meant "Here the Lake Gate closes."

This is made plainer when it is known that these same original inhabitants, with that peculiar fitness for which they were noted in bestowing names, had designated Lake Champlain as *Caniadeguarantah,* "The Lake Gate of the Country." The former was better known to the Woodranger and his class of forest rangers by the designation of "the Lake of the Horicans," though only a few days before the scenes I am describing, in a moment of vainglory, the English commander had bestowed upon this beautiful sheet of water the patronymic of his king, who neither deserved the honour nor honoured the lake with his name. It will answer our purpose better to call it "The Horican," though this explanation may be necessary to avoid confusion.

To one of the peculiar temperament of the Woodranger, more particularly perhaps than to his companions, the scene upon which his gaze now rested was such as to entrance him with its picturesque beauty. It is true there were no ruins overgrown with ivy to conceal their ugliness, or lordly castles commanding fear rather than feelings of admiration; ay, in all that sweep of the human vision, there was no sign of a dwelling — of man.

In this place untamed nature held supreme sway. Hillsides and valleys shone resplendent in their evergreen vestments, and gems of waters reflected

the fleckless azure of the sky and the burnished silver of the setting sun, while above these rose the mountain peaks, pillars more ancient and lasting than the towers of Babel, ornamented with crag-cornices carved from stones where eagles maintained their lonely vigils long ere the fabled birds of Persia flew over the sacred plains of Mesopotamia in their quest for light and surcease from pain.

The bearded lips of the scout moved and parted, as if he were about to speak, but they uttered no word of pleasure or of wonderment. This was partly due to the fact that his gaze, which had taken in the grand panorama at a single sweep, had now fallen upon an object afloat about midway upon the lake, as it was unfolded to his vision.

Indian Plume was already pointing toward it, and Stark, his attention arrested by it, exclaimed:

"It is a canoe, though I cannot see that there is any one in it."

"Aweel, now's me," declared the Woodranger, "it sets too low in the water to be empty. I think it no wanton waste o' jedgment to say there is some one in it."

"An Indian decoy," said the cautious Stark.

"I was minding some sich trail, lad, I swan I was," replied the forester. "I durst ne'er dissemble the truth o' your discretionary idee, but

it may be, like an ol' man, I've grown fearful rather than prudent. I jedge, lass, you are varsed in the unwritten book o' Indian l'arning; what say you o' yon boat that rests like a duck without sense o' light or darkness?"

The maiden, thus directly addressed, replied quickly, as if she had been expecting the question:

"Indian Plume know the canoe has been on the water for one, two, three hours. It not always there, but it keep near the middle of the lake."

"It is a craft o' Mohawk make," said the discerning Woodranger.

"But it might have been stolen by one of the French allies," declared Stark, knowing the doubt existing in his companion's mind.

"If we only had a boat we might go out and see," said Ben Browne.

"And get shot for your trouble," replied Stark.

"I do not see that we have the boat with which to commit the indiscretion," remarked the Woodranger, with a low chuckle.

"But we have one with us worth a dozen boats, and who will act with double the caution we could. Let the Sergeant go out and investigate."

The suggestion was so good that the others did not object, while the intelligent dog pricked up his ears, as if he had already understood what was wanted of him.

"Ay, the dog has shown a marked cunning, and it may be, mind you I say this without the craft o' a prophet, he will act with discretion. While he is on his errant, we can keep a watchful eye."

Having gained the Woodranger's consent to carry out his plan, Stark immediately prepared to instruct the Sergeant in regard to his duty. This he did just as he would have told Ben to have undertaken the same hazardous trip.

"Keep your eye open, Sergeant, and see that you are not caught off your guard. If the canoe is empty or not, and you can, tow it ashore. Don't fear but we will keep a sharp watch on your work, old boy, for I love you too well to send you into needless danger."

The Sergeant's eye had not left the face of his master while the latter was giving him his instructions. When this was completed, the intelligent animal, wagging his tail approvingly, rose on his hind feet and licked with his tongue the chin of Stark.

"The noblest, truest creature in all the world," declared the Ranger, stroking the long hair about the top of his head and smoothing out his ears. "I wish every friend of mine was as true. Now go, Sergeant, and return as quickly as you may, for we have a big night's work ahead."

Then the Sergeant dropped back to his normal position, slipped silently into the water, and was soon swimming industriously toward the distant canoe rocking softly on the lake.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CANOE

"I COUNT sich a friend among the rarest gifts to man, and I am not unmindful of a woman's tender sympathy," remarked the Woodranger, as his gaze followed the course of the dog, whose head could be seen on a level with the surface of the sun-kissed waters. "There be no dissembling with 'em as have but one mind and but one heart and a singleness o' purpose."

The companions of the Woodranger were all watching closely the progress of the Sergeant; even Indian Plume, who had withdrawn slightly apart from the scouts, appearing as anxious as they, though ever and anon she glanced furtively down the shore of the lake where —

"The leaning trees formed a frame for the pictured crystal."

If the cautious Stark failed to notice this concealed uneasiness on the part of the mysterious maid, the Woodranger was watchful of her movements, saying, while he allowed nothing to escape his keen gaze, as if communing with himself:

"It be an amazement crossed and crisscrossed with unknownness. It be unseemly that yon canoe holds innocent life. How calmly the Horican sleeps, like a babe on its mother's breast! Aweel, now's me, it does not require the gift o' a prophet to see that its slumbers will soon be broken. Ay, the deer the brown-faces hunted has laid down to rest, and the kin o' the trout he speared in these pools has grown overbold. But the fibres o' the charm swing in the air like the threads o' a ravelled skein. The trail o' war is winding hither, and natur' must lend her arts to the wanton legions o' men.

"Aweel, it be the irony o' fate that these fair waters and woodlands should be desecrated by the sons o' that God who created it all for their pleasure. Somehow I like the fancy o' the red man consarning the puttin' on the raiments o' the earth. If only the patchwork o' the cunning brain o' the plumed pagan, to me it be fringed with beauty and stitched with natur's arts.

"It is believable that once this fairy-land was barren rock and unsodden earth, where no forest bloomed or clear waters hung their transparent curtains against the twilight. In his lodge o' the Dawn, the Great Spirit looked down upon the cold, naked world, shivering in its desolation, and out of pity he sent his four sons to be warders o' this

realm. One in garments o' red, and features glowing with the warmth o' a melting heart, went to the southland. One took up his abode in the west, his lodge hidden behind the shades o' night. Another, grown gray with his years, and breathing the pitiless breath o' cold and hunger, sought the broad plain o' the northland, from whence he swept with unceasing fury. And the youngest, brightest o' the brothers, flew swifter than the eagle flies to the tent o' the morning star. Tossing his golden and bright plumes under the stars o' heaven, he was merriest o' 'em all. Thus these four brothers, the winds, roamed far and wide the lonely earth without solace and without the fruits o' happiness.

"Seeing that these brothers, as mighty as they were, could not bring the spring-time with its blossoms, the summer with its sunny skies, the autumn with its fruits, or the winter with its cold that makes comradeship dear, the Creator touched the rock with his spear, and the cataract sprang down its noisy race-way, where it still runs its endless trail. He drew a circle around the valley, and the blue lake lifted its smiling face, with dripping lilies on her breast. Then he drew long, crooked lines o'er the rugged earth, and wherever his spear went followed the 'water of serpents,' the rivers. Where he touched lightest, the brooks were born, which were the 'waters of birds.' From the point o'

his dripping spear fell innumerable drops, which became the many-hued trees forming the forests o' the land. As he had given the waters lilies, he gave to the wildwoods roses; ay, he gave to one and all the many sweet and beautiful things that adorn natur'. Then the four brothers, the winds o' the bended sky, were happy in their wanton freedom. Soon the birds o' the air and the beasts o' the forest joined them in their wild carousals, when there came this bridal of winds and waters."

While the Woodranger had been telling this legend of the red men, an unbroken watch had been kept over the movements of the Sergeant, who was now drawing near to the strange canoe. The dog was moving slower now than formerly, as if he was approaching with greater caution the object of his long swim.

"The creature shows proper discretion," remarked the forester, who was aware that the uneasiness of Indian Plume continued to become more apparent as the dog lessened the distance between himself and the canoe.

"I wonder what Sergeant will do when he reaches the boat," said Ben, who could not help admiring the canine's sagacity thus far in his work.

"He'll get it ashore somehow," replied Stark. "I never saw him unable yet to do what he had undertaken. Ha! he is swimming around the

thing; he is trying to make out if it is occupied. Zounds! there is something about it I do not understand. Sergeant is looking in; he knows now, if we do not."

While Stark was speaking, the dog was seen to rise from the water, as if he was indeed trying to get a view inside of the canoe. After this he swam half-around the object, and then he appeared to be starting upon his return.

"He is coming back!" declared Ben. "We shall know no more of the boat than before. I am going to try and swim out to it."

"Nary necessity for that. I opine the dog will trail that bit o' birch to us quicker'n you could go after it."

"Sergeant is true to his word," declared Stark. "He told me just as plain as if he had spoken the words that he would bring that canoe in, and he is going to do it, mark my words."

There was no doubting the intentions of the faithful dog, and all the scouts had to do was to watch and wait the work of the intelligent animal.

"Indian Plume go now," said the strange young woman, speaking for the first time since reaching the shore of the lake.

"Forgive an ol' man for brooking the will o' the flower o' the forest, but it be discretionary that you stay your perambulations a goodish bit longer

— till yon canoe has come to land," said the Woodranger, in a tone of authority.

She looked sharply upon him as he spoke, and for the first time Stark saw her uneasiness and desire to leave the place.

"Sergeant will not be long in towing it in ashore," he said. "Why is the maid in haste to go?"

"Long way to go. Indian Plume can be of no more good to white men."

But the Woodranger seemed determined that she should remain, and that was sufficient reason in Stark's mind that she should. Finding it would not be good policy to disobey the forester, she concealed her chagrin, and resumed the watch with the others in silence.

Sergeant was now coming into plain sight, when it was soon discovered that he was towing the canoe by a line which he held between his teeth, while he resolutely breasted the water. The scouts naturally came to the conclusion that he had found this thong hanging from one side of the boat, and had wisely seized upon it as his means of getting the canoe ashore.

No sooner had the dog begun to come near to the shore than Stark went out into the water to his knees, to assist the Sergeant the moment the canoe came within his reach.

"Good Sergeant," said his master, approvingly, "you have done nobly, — better than I expected. But who can those be in the boat?"

Standing on shore, the Woodranger had already seen that the canoe carried two persons, or at least two bodies lay in its bottom. Both of these remained as motionless as if dead.

"Some victims of Indian slaughter," thought Stark.

As the Sergeant touched bottom with his feet, he relinquished the canoe to the care of his master, giving his body a tremendous shake by way of relief, while the scouts crowded down to the side of the canoe.

"Are they dead?" asked Ben Browne, upon seeing the figures in the boat.

"I thought at first they were," said Stark, "but the young man breathes."

"Aweel, now's me, one be a woman, not young like Indian Plume, nor yet ol' like my — "

Here the Woodranger suddenly checked his speech, and, though it was not noticed by the others, save the forest maid, he turned pale, and for a moment he threatened to fall. But he quickly recovered himself, and, giving the occupants a closer scrutiny, he murmured to himself, his thoughts finding expression in incoherent language:

"It cannot be she! These ol' eyes have lost their

cunning, or has this ol' head run away with me as the spring freshet gets away with the babbling brook? The forehead, the mouth, the chin are the same, I swan I believe they are. She — here! It can ne'er be — nay — "

"What did you say, Woodranger?" asked Stark, looking up from the prostrate figures into the face of the forester. "Do you know them?"

"*I* say — *I* say?" fairly gasped the scout, while the bronze upon his features suddenly took on an ashen hue. Then, rallying, he added: "I was only thinking, William, but, good Lord! what a noisy thinker I'm getting to be! It is a weakness that comes with the years, lad, so do not blame an ol' man with a cross. But, here we are as if we were not within a moon's perambulation o' a plumed pagan, to say nothing o' the boastful Frincher, worse than pizen, and nary an eye on watch. It is a wanton indiscretion. Do you look after the twain in the canoe, and I will cast an eye to the inemy."

Without stopping for a reply to this suggestion, the much perturbed Woodranger began to patrol the narrow beach, every sense of his strained in his watchfulness.

Used to the moods of his older companion, and loving him the better for them, William Stark now

gave his whole attention to the couple in the boat, saying to his friends:

"Here, Ben, Lige, lend a hand, and we will lift him out upon the ground, where he will rest more comfortably. And the woman, too. See! he is wounded."

The others quickly did as they were requested, and a moment later the young man was placed tenderly down upon the white sand just beyond the reach of the water. Then William Stark, with a gallantry natural to him, removed his jacket and spread it carefully upon the smooth beach, saying:

"We will place the woman upon that. I am afraid she is not likely to recover. Easy there, Lige, how clumsy you are! Ben and I can do better alone."

While he was speaking, he gently raised the head and shoulders of the unconscious woman, and, with the assistance of Ben, he transferred her from the canoe to a place beside the man.

"They are mother and son," he declared, "mark my word for that. He is the image of her, and a likely looking fellow, too. I do not see — ha! she is wounded in the shoulder. See the blood upon my hand. It is a bitter shot. Here, Wood— "

"Hush, lad! do not profane the air with that name here — now! Forgive the ol' man for his foolish whim. Ay, it be a whim, and there is noth-

ing so foolish as a whim. You will humour the ol' whimmer, William?"

"Of course, Wood— I mean, Taconica," replied Stark, with considerable surprise.

"Now's me, William, that's the call. Taconica is good. You'll ne'er forget to trail that thought, lads?" appealing to Ben and Lige, who gave willing consent.

Having exacted this promise, he started toward the wounded stranger, murmuring as he drew near to her:

"It be risky — risky, like the foolishness o' the hunted buck that looks back into the hunter's face — and yet, the e'en" (eye) "that is locked canna see the sun, na the burn" (brook) "that is drae" (dry) "whisper its secrets."

CHAPTER VI.

WARNING OF THE COMING BATTLE

With this soliloquy upon his lips, which continued to move even after he had ceased to speak, the Woodranger bent slowly, thoughtfully over the unconscious woman until he had noted each lineament of her features, and had seen that the garments about her left shoulder were stained with blood. Then, slowly waving his left hand around, as if he would motion his companions to retire to a greater distance, he began to loosen the clothes over the wound.

His movements were swifter now, and he had quickly bared the white flesh encircling the discoloured skin, when he bent a searching look upon the place. As he did so, he brushed his hand across his eyes twice, as if to remove some cloud which had gathered over them. He did not seem to breathe during his hasty examination, when he lifted his head and beckoned to Indian Plume, who had been standing a short distance away, a silent and awed spectator of the scene.

"Fetch a goodish handful o' water from the

Horican," he whispered rather than spoke aloud. "There be a saving grace in water that is pure, and first o' all I must get the signs o' this trail o' lead afore I can read its amazement."

He had not finished speaking before the light-footed Indian Plume had reached the side of the crystal water, and scooping up a double handful, she hastened to the aid of the Woodranger.

"Is the white fawn lost to life?" asked the maid, softly.

"Nay, lass, that may not be," replied the forest surgeon, clearing the wound of its clotted blood with a gentleness of touch that only a strong man can give. "The birch that lost its foliage last year lives again, so the soul that escapes its earthly shell finds greater freedom in a newer sphere. She breathes, if you call that life, but it be a gift o' mercy that she feels not the hurt o' my bungling fingers. It be an ugly trail wound by that bit o' lead, as if it had a spite against her who had held no wrong against it. Now's me, it did seek the heart, but it missed it by the breadth o' a hair. It was sent upward and outward, but, like a hunted thing, was driven criss-angle to its purpose. It seemed to get bewildered now, and, like a deer that can run no farther, it laid down to rest. And — aweel! hyur's the inemy where it'll ne'er hurt her more."

As he finished speaking, so swiftly and dexterously had the Woodranger acted, he now held up between his thumb and forefinger the little globe of lead which had come so near taking the life of the woman. The work of this uncouth surgeon, who moved with as much celerity and precision as any trained operator might have done, applied more of the limpid water brought him by Indian Plume, and quickly staunched the flow of blood by a generous application of thin, dark-coloured salve that he produced from his stock of supplies, and some lint scraped fine and soft. This accomplished, he restored the clothing to their proper position, saying as he did so:

"The salve o' the oak, if properly prepared, be the master o' healing. It is nature's remedy. How her temples do throb! The warm blood has found its old trails, but blunders along like a child that has not the secret o' its strength," bathing her forehead as he spoke, and chafing the hands and wrists, joined in this by Indian Plume.

While they, the Woodranger and the unknown maid, worked together to restore life to the unconscious form, Stark and Ben were performing very similar action over the youth. The former had dressed his wound, if not as successfully as the forester had treated his charge, in a creditable manner. At any rate, this patient began to open his eyes

before the task was fairly completed, and now he arose to a sitting posture, looking around in a dazed, bewildered way. The Ranger laid a restraining hand on his shoulder, to keep him from trying to gain his feet.

"Where am I?" asked the stranger. "Is this — I remember — the shot — the yells — how they ring in my ears! But mother! where is she?" and it required all of Stark's strength, and he was strong-armed, to keep the speaker from leaping to his feet.

"Do not overexert yourself, sir," admonished the Ranger. "Your mother is safe —"

"There she is!" cried the other, pointing to the woman, who at that very moment was beginning to move, and Indian Plume exclaimed, as she clapped her hands with joy:

"She lives — she opens her eyes!"

Before one of the four scouts could speak, a light step was heard in the growth near at hand, and an instant later a lithe, dusky figure burst into view close by their sides.

It was Philip, the friendly Sokokis!

As the wounded woman had begun to show signs of returning consciousness, and her eyes opened in wonder, the Woodranger had sprung back, as if alarmed at this awakening. He was now the first to address the Sokokis chief, asking:

"What cheer bring you, Philip? By the hornbeam o' the Ossipees, it is no common errant that brings you hither on sich a foot."

"French on the war-path!" replied the forest runner in his vivid, terse speech.

"Near?" asked the Woodranger, more than equalling the brevity of Philip.

"They were near Crown Point, and moving toward Carillon.[1] From there they will march toward the Mohawk, to surprise the English."

"Now's me, that shows the Frinch are not as slow as our Britishers, who take so long to think that they have no time to act. It may be better that the Frinch move, so long as you have trailed their purpose, Philip."

"Tell us all you know, Philip," said Stark. "We have been sent by General Johnson to reconnoitre about Crown Point, and to see what the French are doing at Carillon. Here we have lost a whole month fooling about trifles, and waiting for orders from home governments. Go on, Philip, with your account."

Franklin used to compare these British commanders of the regular army to the figure of St. George found upon the signs of the hostelries of that time,

[1] Indian name for Ticonderoga, a bold point of rocky earth commanding the waters of Lake Champlain by both the routes of Lake George and Wood Creek. — AUTHOR.

"always on horseback, but never going on." But the delays were due also to other causes than the sluggish action of the commander. The five provincial governments could not unite in their courses of action, and little questions of argument were constantly adding to the vexations of the leaders of the English forces. As a matter of fact, four Mohawk scouts had returned from Canada with the report that the French were about to start with eight thousand men to defend the entrance to Lake Champlain, over two weeks before, but still the English dallied. A demand was made upon New England for more troops, and the main body of the army had moved up the river to the end of the "great carrying-place," where a fortified storehouse called Fort Lyman and then Fort Edward was begun, as has been mentioned. Two old Indian trails led from this spot to Lake Champlain, one by the way of Lake George and the other a parallel route by Wood Creek. As it was uncertain which way the French would be most likely to favour, there was hesitancy as to which trail the English should fortify or prepare to defend. Wood Creek was first selected, but soon after abandoned for the other, and forthwith two thousand men were ordered to march to Lake George.

The path was rough, and the journey was made with moderate movements, though the shore of the

Horican was reached before nightfall, and there, within sight of the beautiful sheet of water, which the commander lost no time in naming for his king, the soldiers went into camp. Their camping-place was near where Fort George was afterward raised. Singular enough, the good-natured commander, who seemed to be more anxious to please his men than to prepare for the enemy, made no move to fortify here, nor did he try to ascertain what the French might be doing. So a whole week passed with no greater action than the moving of further stores from Fort Lyman, and an occasional scout in the direction of Wood Creek.

The little party under Stark, whose adventures interest us, was a final exception to the rule. And to this party we will return to learn the message Philip was bearing to General Johnson. The Sokokis replied to Stark's request in nearly the following words:

"French very much alive — not bit like English. They come to Crown Point, with Indians and Canadians, then to Carillon, where they leave a part of their men, and move in canoes up Lake Champlain to where the lake very narrow and two big white rocks keep guard.[1] Here more are left to keep watch, while others go in canoes up the lake further and further along the Drowned Lands.

[1] Near the site of the present town of Whitehall.

Then they come where waters divide, and they keep along into South Bay to its head. From there they begin march through forest, and last night they camp by Big Cat Brook. To-day they march upon English camped near Lake George."

"And we shall be too late to warn Johnson of his peril?" asked Stark, anxiously.

"It may be not," replied Philip. "Lot of men do not move always as fast as they expect."

"True, Philip. How many are there, do you think, of the French and their allies?"

"Not far from fifteen hundred, counting six hundred Indians."

"Not many for our troops to overcome if they are only on their guard and act promptly. But this will not do for us, Philip. The news must be carried, not only to General Johnson, but to Colonel Blanchard, stationed with his New Hampshire men at Fort Lyman. We shall miss Captain Rogers, who, if I am not mistaken, has not returned from his scout to the Mohawk."

"What is to be done for this young man and his mother, to say nothing of the girl?" asked Ben Browne.

"It would be unjust for us to leave them to a fate they could not hope to escape in a country overrun by an enemy that knows no mercy," replied the humane Stark. "If you and the Wood-

ranger will see them into camp, I will scout toward South Bay, while you, Philip, hasten to camp with the news of the close approach of the foe."

"Nay, lad," said the Woodranger, who was continuing to show great excitement for him, "let the youngsters trail with the women and the wounded youth, while I perambulate into the inemy's camp. I can do it, I swan I can, lad."

While Stark was willing to humour his friend, there were reasons why he should insist upon his plan. So he said:

"You will be of more help to them than a dozen youngsters, Woodranger, and, mark my words, they will need all of your cunning carefulness before they run the gauntlet of the enemies."

"I can read the sign clear enough to see that, William, but there be personal p'ints in this amazement which it may be well to favour. I will help to kiver the trail, lad, but more I cannot do. Mebbe that'll be enough. But, with all that discretion, there be other knots to unravel. Neither the woman nor the boy can perambulate through the forest, and I opine it will ne'er be discretionary for 'em to follow the water to camp, allowing that there be a camp to find when we get along."

"I was thinking of that —" began Stark, but, seeing that Indian Plume wished to speak, he

stopped, indicating by a nod of his head that he was ready to listen to her.

"If the white scout thinks it best, the poor woman and her son can be taken to my cabin, which I call 'The Lookout.' It is only a little way from the edge of the water, and, once there, they will be as safe as anywhere outside of the camp from the prowling enemies."

"Good!" said Stark. "It will be the best we can do at present. As soon as we have driven the French and their red allies away, we will take them to Fort Lyman. I see, Philip, you are anxious to be going, and it is right you should be. May you find swift passage to the camp."

The next moment the faithful scout vanished into the forest, and his light step was no longer heard.

"Now, Woodranger, if you and Ben will go with these others, Lige and I will look after the enemy. The Sergeant may go with you as watchman if you wish him."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOME OF INDIAN PLUME

STARK, who could see that this plan ill suited the Woodranger, said:

"If you insist upon it, Woodranger, I will go with them and you may take my place. I think Colonel Blanchard would not complain, though you must know I am expected to report before to-morrow morning. As you do not belong to the regiment by enlistment, you are your own master. I will answer for Ben."

"Aweel, now's me, William, I unravel the skein to the last knot. I ne'er shirked a duty, and I am not going to shift this. It be growing dark soon. You lift them into the canoe, and Ben can take 'em across the water. I will foller — sort o' trail on to see a brown-face does not scent their tracks. Mebbe I'd better perambulate down the shore a bit to see that no red is now clus by."

William Stark heard and understood, and nodding to the forester, he lent his assistance to Ben and Lige in getting the fugitives back into the canoe. As soon as this was done, he said:

"Row them according to the directions of Indian Plume, Ben. The Sergeant may go with you. Taconica does not think the canoe will hold another, but you can count upon him to be on hand to help you as soon as he is needed."

"We are sorry to put you to so much trouble," said the young man. "I would fain know to whom we are indebted for this kindness."

"My name is William Stark."

"I have heard Rob speak of you and John Stark."

"He is my brother, and is now near by with the New Hampshire Rangers under Captain Robert Rogers."

"Can that be true?" asked the other, in pleased surprise. "Do you hear that, mother? Robert Rogers is near by. Can you tell me if you have ever known a man called 'The Woodranger,' Mr. Stark?"

"I think I did know such a man once," replied Stark. "But you will pardon me if I leave you, sir. I must report at camp."

"Forgive me for having detained you so. I hope to see you again, for mother and I are anxious to find this strange man, the Woodranger."

Stark felt that he had already lost too much time, and, without replying to the young man, he bade the little party a safe passage across the lake, and

the next moment, with Lige Bitlock upon his heels, he disappeared up the path in the direction Philip had taken a few minutes before.

The Woodranger was to be seen in the distance slowly moving along the shore, and realizing what was expected of him, Ben now took his position in the canoe, with paddle in hand. Indian Plume took a post in the prow of the light craft, and only the Sergeant remained to enter the boat.

This faithful follower of Stark had started to go with his master, but a word from the latter had sent him back to the others, and now, at a word from Ben, he plunged into the water and swam after the canoe as it was carried out toward the middle of the lake by his strong arm.

"How are you feeling, mother?" asked the young man, in a tone of deep solicitude, while he held her head in his lap.

"As comfortable as could be expected, my son. But I have had such a dream. I thought some one I knew in my young days, before all this trouble and anxiety had come into my life, stood before me, and he seemed to speak to me in the old familiar voice."

"It was a dream, mother. We have fallen among friends, and, though we are still in a country overrun with enemies, let us hope we shall safely get out of it."

"Amen, my son. But how are you feeling, Alex? Forgive me for my forgetfulness of you."

"I am all right, mother; at least, I shall be in a few days. Now you must not get excited."

Ben was plying his paddle with diligence, and the shore of the lake was only a misty outline in the gathering gloom of the approaching night. The silence of the twilight hour was unbroken by a sound deeper than the gentle swish of the water as it beat against the sides of the light craft being propelled with rapid strokes onward by the lusty arm of Ben. Indian Plume, from her vantage, was maintaining a close watch of their surroundings as far as her youthful vision could reach, while her mind seemed to be occupied with uncommon thoughts. The young man who had nothing just then to take up his attention had become absorbed by her appearance. Her picturesque beauty charmed him, and he soon became forgetful of the perils environing them, until suddenly he saw her give a quick start of alarm, and a moment later, as if she had anticipated it, the dull report of a firearm came booming over the water with unnatural clearness.

"Dear me! what was that?" asked the woman, in alarm.

"Some chance shot, mother," replied her son.

"I do not believe we need be disturbed, do you, miss?" addressing Indian Plume.

"I think it was the old woodsman's gun," she replied. "I am afraid, though I am not sure, that there is a canoe full of Indians on the lake. They must be Hurons."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the frightened woman, "what if they come this way?"

"They cannot overtake us before we reach the Lookout," said Indian Plume. "There is another shot. What can it mean? I hope they will not kill the old man."

After this nothing was said for several minutes, while no further cause for alarm came from the distance. The darkness had now settled upon the lake, so they could not discover an object far away. Ben continued to send the canoe ahead at a rapid rate, despite the burden it bore, and the gaze of Indian Plume was now fixed ahead. Presently the keen eyes of Alex discovered the near proximity of the shore, and saw rising so abruptly from the water as to tower almost over their heads the rugged side of a mountain.

"Steer for that rock shelf a little to your right, white man," directed Indian Plume, who had arisen to her feet and stood peering into the space in their track.

"Are we almost there?" asked the woman.

"I think so, mother," replied her son. "Is that not so, miss?" he asked of the maiden.

"Lookout where you see tall pine — taller than the rocks," answered Indian Plume, briefly, looking now to see that the canoe did not ground upon the rocks.

Alex had seen before this a giant pine whose massive trunk rose from the narrow band of land between the shore of the lake and the base of the mountain like a monarch among the smaller trees that clothed the height in its primeval garb. But he looked in vain for any sign of a human habitation. In fact, the very nature of the mountain-side seemed to make it impossible for a dwelling to find room for its walls, though there was ample foundation for them in the granite cliffs frowning upon the intruder.

As they drew nearer, a small cove was seen toward which Indian Plume guided the canoe, and no sooner had it entered the shallow water than she sprang out, to bring it to a standstill under the over-hanging branches of a birch then in foliage.

Ben followed her example, while at the same time the faithful Sergeant emerged from the water beside him.

"Where is your house?" asked Ben in good faith.

Indian Plume laughed softly, saying:

"Follow me. It is not far, but it is a hard path to climb. I wonder if the old woodsman will be here soon to help you."

"I wish I could walk," said Alex. "But I am so helpless, as well as mother."

"No need," replied Indian Plume. "Ben and I make a seat like this," crossing her hands in imitation of a "chair." "Me strong; she not very heavy."

Alex was fain to agree to this plan, as much as he would desire to spare her the effort. But Indian Plume soon proved that she was as good as words, for she bore her part of the burden with quite as much ease as did stout Ben Browne, who had worked in the woods all of his life and had muscles like iron.

Upon pushing their way through the fringe of bushes skirting the water, it was found that a well-worn path wound up the ascent, passing around huge boulders and clinging at times to narrow rims of rocks, but finally coming to what looked from the outside like a thick growth of hemlock covering a small plateau of about a hundred feet square resting upon the mountainside. Rising beside this, and towering far above it, stood the great pine already mentioned.

Upon gaining this place, Indian Plume pushed her way through the living wall, while she con-

tinued to assist Ben in bearing the injured woman. Inside this natural barrier Ben was surprised to find a small cottage made of stones, the whole arranged and built by some experienced person. The roughness of its exterior was relieved by vines and creepers festooning its walls and hanging in fantastic draperies over its entrance.

As it was dark within the abode, Indian Plume led the way carefully to a couch of furs at one side, where the woman was allowed to rest after her trying trip hither.

"I will soon have a light," said the maid, and a moment later she had ignited a pitch knot by some coals slumbering upon the stone hearth. Seen by this flickering blaze, Ben was surprised to find that there was an air of comfort and beauty about the humble room he had scarcely expected. Alex was assisted in the same manner as his mother, and he, more than the young Ranger, was pleased by the cosy appearance of the apartment.

"What a strange place for a home," he said, "and how nicely you have it all arranged. Surely you do not live here alone?"

"Alone," she said, simply, beginning to fan the coals of fire. "Is the lady feeling better?"

"Pardon me, mother, for forgetting you," said Alex, rising on his couch, the words of Indian

Plume recalling his mind back to his maternal duty. "Are you resting comfortably?"

"Better than might be expected after what I have been through. My wound feels so much easier. Some one has dressed it."

"Yes, mother, though I did not see him until he was turning away. Can you tell us who he was, Mr. Browne?"

"An old scout called Taconica," replied Ben, recollecting the Woodranger's promise in season to escape speaking the name by which he was best known. "He is very skilled in that."

"What do you think has become of him?"

"I am at a loss to say. But, as I am not needed any more here, I think I will begin a little guard duty just outside the building. With the enemy prowling about, it stands us in hand to keep our eyes open."

"I will watch for you a little later," said the other.

"I shall not be alone, for the Sergeant will be with me. He has already begun his vigil."

CHAPTER VIII

VOICES OF THE NIGHT

As Ben had expected, he found the Sergeant lying upon the ground a short distance from the door, his nose resting upon his fore paws, while his eyes were fixed upon a small opening in the hemlock wall surrounding the dwelling.

"Good Sergeant," said Ben, patting the dog upon his head, while he took a position beside him. "Do you see any sign of danger?"

The dog wagged his tail, moved a little nearer his companion, to continue his watch without further notice of him.

Ben's mind was quickly filled with thoughts of home, and the father and mother who at that moment might be thinking of him. How far to him seemed his home, though, as we travel to-day, it was only a few hours' journey. He fell to wondering what the morrow would bring forth, and if there was to be some hard fighting with the allied enemies. He knew enough of Indian warfare to dread the coming scenes, though he was no coward. The French, he had been told, were better fighters

than the English. "If we had more men like those under Rogers, and more leaders like the brave Ranger chief, it would fare better with us," he thought. "General Johnson is not bad, but he's too slow. Well, all we can do is to keep our eyes open and do our best. Who can this pretty girl be who is living here in this strange fashion, and why is she here?"

While communing thus with himself, Ben could not help noticing that the night seemed uncommonly, unnaturally quiet. Not a sound broke the darkness, relieved now somewhat by the stars overhead, which were scarcely brighter than the mimic stars dancing in the clear waters of the Horican, where patches of the lake were to be seen through rifts in trees, which answered the purpose of windows.

In the midst of his lonely vigil, Sergeant suddenly lifted his nose and sniffed the air sharply for a moment, when he dropped his head to its former position.

"What is it, Sergeant?" asked Ben, somewhat alarmed, for he had not discovered anything suspicious.

He had barely asked the question before the shrill note given by a hawk as it swoops down upon its prey broke the ominous silence of the scene. Apparently it came from the water below him, and

he was for a moment deceived by the sound, believing it came from a real bird that had in some manner approached him without being seen. But the cry of the hawk was quickly followed by the subdued *tu-who* of an owl, and half-springing to his feet, he exclaimed under his breath:

"The Woodranger!"

He had scarcely uttered this exclamation before the tall figure of the forester stood directly in front of him. His hand instantly dropped to his gun, and he was about to lift the weapon, when the Woodranger said:

"Nay, lad, it be a wanton indiscretion to lift a finger when the inemy has crisscrossed your trail. It was discretion you wanted a bit 'arlier. But forgive the ol' man for his foolishness, and tell him if the others be safe within the stone hut."

"Safe, Wood— I mean, Taconica. But how came you so soon, when we expected you had been killed?"

"I know nothing as to what you may have expected. I came as soon as might be. The reds did give me a bit o' an amazement, and I do not previcate the truth when I say, had I been prone to sich wanton foolishness, I might have fringed my leggin's with scalp-locks, but I'd ne'er mar their beauty for their race in the happy hunting-grounds, I swan I wouldn't. Man is ugly enough at his best, let

alone the brown-faced pagan, whose mirror is the waters that swallows his imperfections. The canoe I captured from 'em did sarve me a good turn, and I was keerful to kiver it where 'twill come in handy, it may be, by and by. But how my tongue rattles on the rocks o' conceit, like the fall wind through a frost-bitten forest, when there be trails to follow which winds through many lives. Durst know it, lad, the woods be full o' prowling heathens with mouths parched for human blood. The Frinch are up and movin', something to their credit, I swan it is."

"Do you think we are in danger here, Taconica?"

"I durst ne'er dissemble; there is not a rock or tree or bit o' water where one could call himself free. I ne'er claim the craft o' a prophet, but to-morrow's tale will be writ in blood. How did the woman and the young man make their jarney here, Ben?"

"They seemed to gain, rather than lose, strength, Wood— Taconica. That strange girl and I made them as comfortable as possible, and she is with them now, while the Sergeant and I took up our station here."

"Which showed proper discretion, lad. You have the gift o' woodcraft, and with proper training you will be a credit to Rogers' Rangers. Rob

took to it like a duck to the water, and the Stark boys were ne'er laggards in picking up the signs. I know not if their book-l'arning be great, they were mother-taught and forest-trained, which will stand 'em in good hand. So the woman picked up a leetle strength, lad?"

"Yes, Taconica. She rallied in a remarkable manner."

"Didst notice the eye, lad? Did that look bright and cheerful, even as the morning sun looks when it has flung aside the robes o' night and smiles down upon the new-born earth?"

"Her eyes did seem very bright, Taconica. I could not help noticing that. And she seemed to be looking around, as if she was expecting to see some one come forward and speak to her."

The Woodranger suddenly started forward, and, grasping the hand of Ben, exclaimed in a voice lowered to a whisper:

"Did she do that, lad? And you trailed sich a look? Did she call any name? let drop any word that would give you a sign o' who she might be seeing with her mind's eye? Now think clus to the ground, lad, clus to the ground."

"No, Wood— Taconica, she mentioned no name. In truth, it may have been only my fancy that she was looking for some one. Stay, come to think of it, she did say that she had had a wonderful dream,

in which some one she had known a long time ago stood beside her. Then she asked who had dressed her wound."

"Didst tell her, lad?"

"I said it was an old woodsman who had grown cunning in such matters."

"A discretionary string o' words, lad, save, ay, save the indiscretion o' saying he, who is only a bungler, was cunning in his craft."

With these words the Woodranger turned about, and he stood for what seemed a long time to Ben peering out through an opening in the hemlock wall about them upon a patch of the lake, where the stars danced and glimmered like so many tiny lanterns carried by invisible hands. The night was warm for the season of the year, and here and there small fleecy clouds, looking like fragments torn from the great web of the sky, floated to and fro over the night-blue background. A gentle gust of wind, wafting to them the perfume of the distant pines and the sweetness of summer, shook for a moment the delicate drapery of the hemlocks, and then fled up the mountainside on its solitary way.

"How still it is," said Ben, to whom the silence felt irksome.

"I was marking that, lad, I was. There be ominous signs in these missing notes. It is not natur'. The silence be man-trod. To me there is no music

like the sounds that break the stillness o' the night in the woods. I've listened oft to the vespers chanted by the whippoorwills, when they knew not a human ear was nigh; and, if there be a mournfulness in the song, there is yet a freedom that does not prevail in the songs o' human life. Then there is the owl, doling out a yet more dismal monotone. You may not like it, but to me there is a grander sweep than comes from the toil-strung regrets that cannot be set to music. How oft have I pieced out their broken parts until the whole made a full string, I swan it did. It may have all been the fancy work o' a brain grown foolish in its loneliness, but this was what they doled forth over and again: First, a big fellow in the top o' the sycamore bawled out, *'To woe! to woe!'* Another, near by, breaks forth, *'We go! we go!'* Then a great doubter cries, *'Who? who?'* Then, just as I expect, I swan, another bawls, *'Who? you!'* And then up pipes a leetle feller way off, *'Leetle wit! leetle wit!'* So I pick up the ravelled cries and read, as if writ in a book: 'Of leetle wit, to woe we go — you!'

"There may be leetle wisdom to the croakings o' the half-blind owl, and now I come to trail the thought, I find it may be so, but what could be more fitting to the blighted sycamore that is its nateral home, and the signless swamp that is its kingdom? Coming at the hour o' twilight, atween the light

o' the world and natur', on the threshold o' two days, that o' man and beast, they seemed like the spectres o' unsatisfied souls. By sunlight their cries would be sadly out o' j'int, by night nothing else could be so in tune. Natur' does not miss in her jedgment.

"Aweel, here I be preaching a sarmon, when it would be more consistent with the puppose in hand if I took a wink o' sleep, while you be the eagle. Don't let the ol' man sleep overlong, for there be lively amazements coming."

With these words the forester lay down by the edge of the growth on that side nearest to the precipice overhanging the shore of the lake, though close by the door of the stone house. In a brief while to all appearances he was sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER IX.

TWICE-TOLD TALES

THE Sergeant was resting quietly by his side, though with every canine sense strained to do his duty, as Ben well knew, while the young Ranger maintained his lonely vigil. Yes, it was lonely, though just within the stone dwelling were friends. And within touch of his hand slept as peacefully as a child might upon a bed of down the Woodranger on his couch of uncarpeted rock. Twice he saw the rugged countenance light up as if illuminated by the spiritual lamp, and the bearded lips moved, the name of "Mary" escaping them by stealth. Then, as if feeling guilty for what they had done, his lips closed tightly, and his breath came with deep tension, as if it were fighting a battle with some invisible power.

At that moment the door was swung open, and Indian Plume appeared upon its threshold. She did not speak, but she gazed carefully around, and, seeing Ben and the Sergeant at their posts, she seemed satisfied. At any rate, she returned into the building, though she left the door slightly ajar.

Perhaps it was warm within the structure, or it may be she wished to keep in closer companionship with those without. The answer did not trouble Ben, who was thinking of keener interests. He was wondering if Philip and Stark had reached Johnson's camp, and how this raid of the French would terminate. Baron Dieskau, its leader, he had been told was a born fighter. He was trying to solve the conclusion to the situation in his own mind, when the voice of the young man he had helped to rescue on the lake reached his ears, saying, as if in reply to some question which had been asked him:

"My name is Alexander Briant, and mother and I have come a long way to get here. It seems like a dream to me, only a horrible dream I do not like to recall. Our home was in a country of which you may never have heard, Acadia. We were very happy, mother and father and sister and I, though we knew trouble had been brewing for a long time. It was the same old trouble between the English and the French. Father and mother both came from Scotland, and they tried not to mix up in the affair, but it was impossible to keep clear. The French claimed that father favoured the English, and the latter made a countercharge against him. One night we were surprised by a band of men disguised as Indians, with some Indians among them; our home was burned, sister

and her husband driven away we know not where, father shot down before our own eyes, and mother and I taken off on a boat. We were finally put on board of a ship going to Quebec, and from that town we were sent up the St. Lawrence to Montreal. Then we managed to escape, and in our distress, having an opportunity to do so in company with a regiment of French soldiers, decided to go to New England, where we have friends and relatives. But on the way here we again fell into trouble, were attacked by a party of Mohawk Indians, and at last, wounded and hopeless, found ourselves adrift in a canoe upon the lake. You know how we were rescued, for you were the one to bring it about."

"Alex hasn't told it half as awful as it was," said Mrs. Briant. "No one could. I fear a bitter day is coming for poor Acadia, and that many others will suffer fates even worse than our own.[1] How I wish I knew what had befallen my poor daughter. My unfortunate husband was shot down before my eyes on that terrible night, — as if I had not already suffered enough. But it would be unjust to repine, for there were many pleasant years

[1] The clearness with which Mrs. Briant realized the situation is proven by the fact that within a few days of this very evening that deportation of the people of Acadia was undertaken, when so many peaceful homes were broken and quiet lives made unhappy. — AUTHOR.

that we enjoyed our home by the shores of Minas Basin."

"They were happy years, mother, and we will hope that Mabel has escaped, even as we have. We should be thankful for that, though I feel deeply grieved for poor father."

"True, my son, we have reason to rejoice. But here we are telling our own sorrows and adventures, while I am sure this friend of ours, who is doing so much for us, has a stranger story to tell, and it may be one of greater suffering."

"I was thinking of that, mother. And now, Miss Indian Plume, if it is not asking too much, will you tell us the story of your life? How is it we find you living here in this wild country alone and for no reason that is known to us. I am sure yours must be no uncommon story."

Before replying to Alex's rather fervid request, she went to the door, where she stood for several minutes peering out into the night, with its silent halls and star-diamonded roof. When she returned, she took a seat near the mother and son, saying:

"I have never told my story to any one. This may be because I have never had any one to tell it to. It may be what you call a strange story. I, who know so little of the world, cannot tell. It seems to me like the day and the night, things I

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cannot understand, and, like them, it is both bright and dark.

"I can remember when we did not live here, father and mother and I, for we were together then. We lived among the Mohawks, in a big wigwam by ourselves. Mother, you know, or may not know, was a Mohawk princess. It is still claimed among her people that she was a daughter of the white Maniteau,[1] whose people lived far to the south. Her skin was as the snow, and her hair the colour of the sunlight as it played upon the sands of the Horican. Her life was very lonely until one day, in her wanderings through the leafy greenwood which she loved so well, she met a strange youth, who said he came from a tribe of men living far

[1] There was a tradition among the Mohawks of such a person as Indian Plume described, and she was known as the "White Maiden." She also was known as the "Spirit of the Kaaterskill," and to this day her image is pointed out in one of the many waterfalls that are to be seen in that land. Pursued by her enemies while escaping with her lover, she leaped from a high precipice to what she believed to be death, rather than return to her lodge without him. But the Great Spirit was kind to her, and she was not harmed by her dizzy leap, as he caused a torrent of water to spring from the dry rock, and bear her down the declivity unharmed. More than even that, he made to appear in the new-found cascade of waters her lifelike image, which remains there now as a perpetual reminder that she was deserving of his protection. The Mohawks, upon finding her snowy figure transfixed in the silvery flood gently covering the rough rock, knew she was the especial favourite of the Great Spirit, and they abandoned their pursuit, believing at first she had perished in her mad leap over the cliff. — AUTHOR.

toward the rising sun. They soon became very happy in each other's company, and day by day they were wont to meet by the bank of the singing river, and plight their vows of constancy. When the Mohawk warriors learned of the White Maid's secret, they were very angry, and she was not allowed to leave the lodge to meet her lover again. But if she could not go to him, he found a way to come to her. Cunningly disguised as a Mohawk warrior, he boldly entered the lodge, and so well did he act his part that he soon became her watcher. In the darkness of the night they fled, and she would never have returned, escaping by the kindly help of the good Maniteau, had not the Mohawks seen their error, and, feeling their loneliness without her, sent for her and her husband to come and dwell with them in love and peace.

"One child was born to them, my mother. She was very beautiful. A strange man with a white skin and a tongue that sounded unusual to their ears sought to make her his wife. I cannot tell you much of the story of my father. Perhaps it is better that I cannot. I loved him, for he was good to mother and me. And when she saw that it was making him unhappy to dwell among her people, whom he could not understand, she told him she was willing to go anywhere he wished. Then he caused to be builded this beautiful dwelling, making

it strong enough to defy the winds of the tempest and the arrows of warriors. It may be mother pined for the old life, as she soon faded and went away, leaving father and me alone.

"It was a hard blow for him, and he did not seem like himself afterward, though he was kinder to me than ever. He taught me from the few books that he had, and, what was better, he taught me from his own wonderful store of knowledge. He told me much of the world that lay out of sight of our humble home, until I longed for the wings of the bird that I might fly away. I think he saw that I was beginning to wish for some other life, — a wider sphere in which to live, — for he grew thoughtful day by day, until I came to worry about him. Then he would take me upon his knee, and, stroking my hair, kiss me and fold me closer to his breast, declaring that nothing should separate us.

"In spite of his outward cheerfulness, I could see that some secret sorrow was eating away his happiness. How I longed to gain his complete confidence, for what is the love of a person if you do not have his confidence? But I would never murmur if I could only have it all back just as it was on that afternoon two years ago, when he bade me a light-hearted good-bye, kissed me as he had so many times before, and saying he would be back

in a couple of hours, or by sunset, he went down to the water's edge and stepped into his canoe. I watched him as he paddled away, until lost to sight behind a corner of the rocky shore. That parting glimpse was the last I saw of him!

"I will not try to describe my grief and anxiety, while I waited for him all that livelong night, and the days and nights that followed. I watched, I cried, and I waited in vain."

"And you have never seen him since?" asked Alex, with deep interest.

"No. I had nowhere to go, and so I have stayed here, hoping, hoping poor father would come back to me sometime."

"Your story is sadder than ours, Indian Plume. How lonesome you must have been! Has no one been here to see you?"

"Only the Mohawks. They have been very kind to me, but they could not induce me to go with them to live."

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Briant. "When we go away, you shall go with us to live, though it is little we have to offer."

Indian Plume shook her head sorrowfully, going again to the door to look out at the rugged scene around the stone house.

Though Ben had not to any great extent neglected his duty, he had been so absorbed in the strange

story being told by Indian Plume that for the time he had forgotten his environments. But now he turned back to his watch, and to a realization of his situation. Intuitively he looked toward the Wood-ranger, or the spot which the sleeping forester had occupied a moment before, to discover now to his surprise that he had disappeared!

Whither he had gone or how was beyond his understanding, but the scout was nowhere to be seen within the little enclosure that marked the entrance to the stone house. He was certainly missing, but Ben rubbed his eyes and looked again before he could credit the discovery of his own gaze.

The Sergeant was still at his post, and so quiet that he seemed a part of the rock upon which he lay. While Ben was somewhat reassured over his presence, a swift change came over the animal as he watched him. The ears suddenly lifted, the muzzle was thrust slightly forward, and the eyes took on an uncommon brightness.

Something had occurred to awaken the dog's suspicions, though not a telltale sound had reached the ears of the young Ranger. Lowering his voice to a whisper, Ben asked:

"What is it, Sergeant?"

CHAPTER X.

AN HOUR OF PERIL

In reply to the young Ranger's question, Sergeant lifted his head slightly, and his nose was turned toward the shore of the lake at their feet. His gaze was now fixed intently upon the space leading downward, as if he was looking for some one. Ben's firearm had been beside him all of the time, and now he noiselessly raised the weapon, pushing the hammer back in silence, determined to be ready for whomever or whatever might come. He had not to wait long before his strained hearing detected a slight sound coming from the brink of the precipice where the hemlocks hung like a fringe from the scanty support of the thin layer of earth covering the rock.

Ben's first thought was that it was the Wood-ranger coming back, but this idea had barely shaped itself in his mind before he saw the Sergeant crouch to the rock as if drawn down by some mighty but invisible power. The twin rows of white teeth glistened between the hairy lips, and the eyes snapped like coals of fire.

Then, while the dog watched and waited, and the young Ranger dared not take a long breath for fear of breaking the terrible spell, a tuft of coal-black hair appeared above the rim of rock, and the sinister visage of a Huron warrior was thrust into sight!

It was a moment of terror to Ben, who had never seen such a sight before, though he had met the Indians often in his day. But this painted, hideous countenance, with its blazing eyes and ebony crest that lent a wild, unnatural fierceness to the grim face underneath,[1] coming in that silent, mysterious way at that time and place, for a moment unnerved him.

The bravest are not always in full command of themselves, and Ben was not a coward. Thus he swiftly overcame his weakness, if it was such, and he was about to bring his musket to bear upon the savage, who had swiftly risen so his shoulders appeared above the ledge, when the Sergeant lifted his agile form into the air, shooting past the young Ranger like a cannon-ball. Straight toward the doomed red man he sped, and just as the surprised warrior began to utter his war-whoop of terror,

[1] The Huron Indians had a practice of wearing their black, coarse hair in an upright crest, which gave them an exceedingly fierce aspect, and won for them from the French the term of *la hure*, from which came the name by which they have since been known, "Huron." — AUTHOR.

the sharp teeth of the dog fastened themselves in his neck.

The struggle that followed was short and sharp. The Indian tried in vain to defend himself, but his very attempt to seize upon the creature tugging at his throat caused him to lose his hold upon the side of the rock and scanty growth of stunted trees. He reeled back with a guttural cry of pain, and would have toppled into the depths below had not Sergeant pulled him forward upon the brink of the rock, where his lifeless body hung when the dog had released his deadly hold.

It had all taken place so quickly and unexpectedly that Ben was still wondering over what was being done, as Sergeant stepped back to his post as unconcerned as if nothing unusual had happened. As the dog dropped again at full length on the rock, Ben looked anxiously around, half-expecting to see a circle of swarthy faces and black plumes rise from the sides of the declivity.

If happily disappointed in this respect, he had barely finished his hasty survey when the report of a firearm rang out with marked clearness on the still evening air.

The sharp, ringing sound was borne up to him from the bottom of the cliff, and he quickly decided that it came from the weapon of the Woodranger. With rapt attention he listened for further indica-

tion of what was transpiring below him, but a death-like silence succeeded the shot.

In the midst of his suspense Indian Plume reappeared in the doorway, and simultaneously with her coming the clear note of a bugle-horn prolonged with a peculiar tremolo, as if the player was loath to end his blast.

Ben recognized this as coming from the horn carried by the forester, and he knew, moreover, that it was a warning of peril. But even if such, it brought him a temporary feeling of relief, for he knew his friend was near at hand and watchful.

"What is that firing for?" asked Indian Plume. "Are the Hurons around?"

Then, before Ben could reply, a volley of shots rang on the air, and half a dozen bullets whistled about the head of the maid, some rattling against the stone wall of her dwelling and others coming nearer.

With a cry of alarm, she sprang back into the building and closed the heavy door.

The young Ranger, thinking he was about to be overwhelmed by the enemies who had fairly surrounded him, dropped flat upon the rock, and prepared to defend himself as best he could. He was none too soon, for the next moment a dozen dusky

foemen leaped into the opening, with wild yells of triumph upon their lips.

One of the Hurons leaped forward so close to him that Ben was forced to defend himself by sending a shot pointblank at the half-naked form of the red man, who outstretched his arms in an attempt to grapple hand to hand with him.

The fire was at such close proximity that the young Ranger could not fail to hit his living target, and, with a wild cry of defiance that was lost, the Huron threw up his arms and sank upon the rock. As his weapon was a single-barrelled one, Ben quickly began to reload, ramming down the charge of powder with such haste as he could command. But as he was dropping the bullet down the long throat of the old queen's arm, the Indians attacked him in a body, their wild yells making the night hideous.

That was a moment and a scene Ben Browne never forgot. The horrible visages of the Hurons danced before him like so many fiends, and his first thought was to leap from the top of the crag into the rocky depths below, thinking it better to perish thus than to fall into the hands of the dusky demons thirsting for his blood.

Fortunately he stood his ground. No sooner had the piece of lead rattled down to the powder than, without stopping to follow it with a wad, he fired

at the nearest savage, just as a volley of bullets flew past him. At the same time a shot rang out from one of the openings in the wall of the house, and a second red man went down to rise no more. And already the faithful and valiant Sergeant had charged upon the enemy, springing from one to another with lightning-like rapidity and deadly effect. No less than four fell under his swift and terrible attacks, while a second shot from Indian Plume was sent on its fatal mission.

In the midst of this stirring scene, just as the young Ranger was clubbing his gun to meet the Indians in a hand-to-hand combat, the clarion note of the Woodranger's bugle rang on the scene, and the report of his unerring firearm speedily followed. Then the coonskin cap of the forester appeared above the rim of rock near the path, and his body followed, while his stentorian voice cried:

"Down with the painted pagans!"

This attack caused the Hurons to believe that they were beset by foes on every hand, and sent the survivors headlong from the narrow scene of action.

Indian Plume, from her vantage, seeing that the red men had been temporarily routed, swung ajar the door, and called upon the scouts to enter the house.

Believing that such discretion was the better part

of valour, Ben quickly did as he was requested. But seeing that the Woodranger did not show any inclination to follow, he called out to him:

"Aren't you coming in, Woodranger?"

The young Ranger could have bitten off his tongue for speaking the name, as no sooner had he uttered it than he realized the mistake he had made in his forgetfulness. Though it was too late to recall it, he hoped no one had noticed the name he had spoken. The reply of the forester was prompt, and it gave no indication that he had observed the blunder:

"Nay, lad, it be discretionary for you to find kiver, but the ol' man had better perambulate about a bit."

"If you are not coming in, I am —"

"To kiver!" fairly shouted the scout, and Indian Plume, alive to the situation, closed the door in the midst of Ben's speech.

The action was none too quick to save his life, for the bolt had not slipped into its socket before three or four bullets buried themselves in the wood.

"The Indians have returned to the attack!" cried Indian Plume, springing to one of the apertures that answered both for window and loophole.

Renewed outbursts of frenzied fury came from the assailants, and when Ben had reached another

" window," he saw a war-party of the Hurons re-appearing upon the scene. But, greatly to his misgivings, he looked in vain for the Woodranger or the Sergeant.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CALL OF THE BUGLE

If Ben was at first alarmed over the disappearance of the Woodranger and Sergeant, upon second thought he realized that it was better so. No doubt they had been able to escape the enemy, and were at that moment concealed near by in safety so long as they remained quiet. At any rate, he could do no better than to accept this idea.

"The Hurons are getting more cautious," said Indian Plume from her post. "They will be careful how they expose themselves to our fire."

"Oh, if I could only help you," said Alex Briant. "I must try and do — "

Indian Plume checked his speech with a wave of her hand.

"We do very well," she said. "Hurons not many in sight."

"How many?" asked Alex, anxiously.

"I count ten. There may be others out of sight."

"Ten against two, and one a woman."

"Woman fight sometime well as man. My mother once battled with twenty Hurons all day,"

she replied. "She had taken her place behind a big rock in a narrow pass, and all the Hurons that came could not drive her away until father save her. Poor mother! her fate was a sad one, and I cannot think of it —"

A volley of shots from the enemy at that moment drowned her words, while she shrank back with a low cry of terror. But the shower of lead made no impression upon the stone walls around them.

"It is as good as a fortress," said Indian Plume. "Father built it so it might be our fort of safety in case of an attack by foes."

"Have you ever been attacked here before?" asked Ben.

"Once, when he was here, and it looked for a time as if we were lost, but a biting storm set in, and that, more than our shots, caused the enemies to withdraw. Ha! they are going to beat down the door!"

"We must not let them reach it," declared Ben. "A few shots from us will serve to let them know we are alive."

Indian Plume quickly took the hint, and the report of her gun blended with that of the young Ranger's musket, when there were two Indians less to continue the warfare against them. Howls of rage followed the death-cries of this twain, speaking of the vindictiveness of the survivors.

Mrs. Briant, who had not spoken since the coming of Ben, now gave expression to feelings of horror.

"We have brought this upon them, Alex," she said. "Oh, that this horrible war might end. We shall all be killed."

"I do not believe, mother, there is such danger. This building is well fitted for a defence. If I could only lend a hand, I should not be so uneasy."

A silence had fallen upon the dusky throng outside, which had withdrawn to one side of the opening, and seemed to be holding a council of war.

"They talk to see what to do," said Indian Plume. "We have rest for a little time."

Ben was watching the party closely, wondering while he did so where the Woodranger was at that moment. Had the scout escaped without being harmed, and what would he do?

While the young Ranger was intently watching the exciting scene, anxious to know what the next act might be, he became aware of the fact that a commotion was taking place at one side of the clearing under a clump of hemlocks overhanging the steep pathway leading to the shore of the lake. The savages seemed to be in ignorance of anything unusual transpiring, while one of their number seemed to be haranguing them and pointing excitedly toward the stone house. In the midst of

his fiery speech, as Ben knew it must be from his gesticulations, a bright orb of light suddenly burst upon view at the place mentioned. It looked to the watchers, for Indian Plume was no less attentive to this side acting than the young Ranger, as if a ball of fire had been lifted above the edge of the cliff to the height of a very tall man. And then, lighted with vivid distinctness by its glare, arose into view the figure of a huge person clothed in skins from head to foot. Either hand held a flaming brand, while from eyes, nostrils, and mouth streamed rays of fire and clouds of smoke.

The uncanny figure had scarcely risen into sight, when a shriek was sent up that made the watchers in the dwelling turn pale with horror. The effect upon the Hurons would have been ludicrous if it had not been so serious. Discovering the wild-looking form approaching them only when its unearthly yell broke on the night, the Indians suddenly became spell-bound. The last word died into a husky whisper that the orator was speaking, when he suddenly lost his boastful tone, and with a wild cry of terror turned and fled from the scene!

The followers of the Huron chief quickly proved that they were willing to imitate his example in one respect at least, and, as the unnatural figure, with its fiery orbs of light and its fiendish yells, advanced, the Indians retreated pell-mell down the

declivity. It is not known just how the majority of them made their exit from the scene, but it is quite certain the most of them reached the bottom of the ascent with a great deal more speed than care.

The inmates of the stone house laughed outright, in spite of the seriousness of their situation, while the strange enemy of the red men followed them down the descent, soon disappearing from the sight of those in the dwelling.

Finding that they were pursued, the Hurons, who had fallen in heaps and were smarting with pain, picked themselves up and fled for the shore, while those who had been more fortunate in their flight now led the way for them. Never, it is safe to say, did a dozen or more warriors beat a more inglorious retreat, or scramble into their boats with greater celerity.

Their pursuer did not stop until he stood ankle-deep in the warm, limpid flood of the Horican, and then, as he watched the receding shadows of his victims fading from his view, a low chuckle issued from an orifice lower than the flaming features, and dropping the burning brands from his grasp, he sank down upon a rock near at hand, apparently satisfied with his work.

Meanwhile the occupants of the Lookout began to breathe easier, while they listened to the sounds of the fleeing foes.

"They are taking to their canoes," said Ben. "See! there they go out over the lake. It is too dark for me to be certain, but I think they have all fled."

"Who could that strange creature have been who frightened them so?" asked Indian Plume.

"He was certainly a friend in need and in good time."

When five minutes had passed without any new development, the occupants of the Lookout began to relax their vigilance, and Indian Plume sought the side of the wounded couple, while Ben kept up a close watch over their surroundings.

"Have the Indians given up their attack?" asked Alex.

"Yes. How is my brother feeling?"

"Better, Indian Plume. What an odd name! Haven't you got another that I may use?"

"Nobody ever found fault with that before," she replied. "It seems very appropriate for me, too. Indian Plume is the name of a scarlet flower that blooms by the brooks and water shores in early autumn. I plucked yesterday the first one I have seen this season, and I placed it in my hair. Long moons ago, when the quick death sought its own, it took a young brave who was loved by a Mohawk maid. She plead vainly for the medicine-men to save him. The sky was set with the sign of rage

against the race, and the greatest and wisest knew all must perish unless the wrath of Maniteau was overcome by the giving of a life. But that life must be pure and without an enemy. The sachem told his people the message he had read in the smoke that rose from his wigwam fire, and in the sounds that came from the trees smiting themselves together. But it was known to be no easy thing to find such a person as was demanded for the offering, and the chiefs looked without finding one who could save them. The blight was still upon the people. No warrior was strong enough to grapple with it as he could with the bear, or the cunning Huron.

"The lodgment was in despair, when the maid who had lost her lover entered the council-house and offered herself as the sacrifice. 'I am a blighted flower,' she said, 'and I trust I have no enemies.' And they searched without finding one who had aught against her, and it was found that her life was spotless. So she died for her people, and was buried by the side of her lover, near the brook where they had strayed so oft. The quick death was driven away, and from her grave sprang up the bright flower to be called 'Indian Plume,' keeping fresh her memory and sorrow. I have made no such sacrifice, but the Mohawks began to call me Indian Plume when I was small, and the name has clung to me ever since."

"I like it better, now I know its origin," said Alex. "I can see that it is an emblem of sacrifice and unselfishness. I think it very aptly applied."

"Didn't I hear you call the name of 'Wood-ranger?'" asked Mrs. Briant, speaking to Ben, as the latter turned to join the little group.

The question came so suddenly and unexpectedly that for a moment it quite took away Ben's power of speech. He remembered his promise to the forester, and regretted that he had committed such a mistake. He tried to think of some way to remedy the evil he had done. He saw, too, that Alex was all attention, and he quickly added:

"I heard him, mother! It must be the man we are looking for."

"A man by that odd name is an old friend of ours," exclaimed Mrs. Briant, seeing Ben's hesitation. "At least he was a friend to my son. I did not see him then, but I have reason to think he was a very dear friend of mine in my earlier life."

"We are all Rangers," stammered Ben. "You know that is the name given to the men under Captain Rogers. I am a Ranger — a wood-ranger!"

Mrs. Briant, who Ben could see was not satisfied with his answer, was about to speak, when a clear note, wound on the same horn which had aroused the fugitives once before, fell on their ears.

After a short pause, this was repeated twice, when it was heard no more.

"It's the Wood— Taconica calling to me!" declared Ben, biting his tongue to think he should have made the mistake which he was even then trying to explain away.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EXCITING RACE

"How do you know that it is your friend calling to you?" asked Indian Plume, as Ben started toward the door, anxious to escape any further questioning on the part of the others concerning the identity of the scout. He realized that it was difficult to break away from an old habit, and he had become so used to speaking of him as the Woodranger, it was little wonder he had committed the mistake a second time.

"I should know the sound of that horn among a hundred," he replied to the maid. "And the old Ranger has a regular code by which he uses it. If he hadn't wanted me to come to him he would have given only two notes. I do not think there is any danger. The Hurons have evidently all gone away."

"Be careful," admonished Mrs. Briant. "When you come back, I want to speak more fully of this friend of yours. Something tells me he is the friend I have looked for so long."

Without more delay Ben opened the door, and,

while Indian Plume stood by so as to close it the moment he had passed out, he stepped forth into the night.

Light, fleecy clouds were moving sluggishly across the sky as if they realized that they had the whole night in which to perform their flying trip, but it was still clear enough for him to see the forms of the dead Hurons lying under the edge of the hemlocks skirting the little opening. As his gaze ran over the scene, it fell upon a brighter object, which was nothing less than the form of the faithful Sergeant stretched at full length by his post of duty, as watchful as ever.

The dog pricked up his ears as Ben appeared, and he looked toward him with evident pleasure.

"Good Sergeant," greeted the young Ranger, in a low tone, "I am glad you escaped their bullets."

Sergeant lifted his head a little higher at the sound of his voice, but he did not offer to leave his position.

Judging from the direction of the bugle-notes that the Woodranger was at the foot of the cliff, Ben lost no time in descending the rocky pathway winding down to the shore of the lake. As he descended below the border of hemlocks and came into plainer sight of the water glistening in the distance, he discovered the tall form of the Woodranger standing by the great gnarled roots of the

giant pine. The forester had already seen him, and, in his low, cautious tone, he said:

"It does these ol' eyes good to look on you, lad. I jedge there be no uncommon amazement in the rock castle up yon?"

"None whatever, Woodranger, thanks to you — to you and the Sergeant."

"The Sergeant, lad? You do well to speak o' him. He was worth any dozen o' men, and I'm no more forgetful o' Rogers hisself. He did good work, and he has gone back to his post."

"But it was really that wild-looking creature in skins and fire that frightened the reds away. I expect it was you, Woodranger."

"Silence, it may be, previcates the truth. I will ne'er dissemble. 'Twere a bungling 'fair, — a few skins plucked from their own boat, some punkwood picked on the shore o' the Horican, and a screech a painter may have been ashamed to trail. Let that be, lad. I opine the brown-faces will ne'er double on their track afore morning. Then, too, without claiming to be a prophet, it may be they and their kin, with the Frinchers, have all they can ketch and hol' at the end o' the Horican."

"What can we do, Woodranger? I am supposed to report at camp as soon as I have completed my scout."

"I can read that sign, but is it discretionary for

you to do so as the stick floats? There be personal p'ints in this amazement which riffle the jedgment as rocks split and tangle the waters o' some noisy brook. Are they — the lad and the woman — mind you, I do not wish to meddle in 'fairs that ne'er cross my path — are they able to perambulate from here?"

"They are not, Woodranger. At least, the woman could not do so unless she were carried."

"I do not previcate the truth when I say that I opined as much. Is it discretionary for 'em to tarry here alone, and I'm not unmindful o' the purty lass that habits here?"

"It would not be right for us to desert them at this critical time."

"Jes' the sign I picked up, lad, I swan it is. You may be needed at the camp, lad; I ne'er blame you for looking that way. It is the way a true soldier should look. Now let me trail a thought. In this narrow path one can well keep half a hundred Hurons at bay, and an ol' man may be — mind you, I say this with proper discretion — may be as good for sich work as the young and nimble. So do you take that canoe there and get to Johnson's camp as soon as may be. Tell him what you have picked up. It may unravel a skein for him. The ol' man will tarry here, and watch out for the inemy as the ol' eagle watches for its young."

"But that seems like deserting you when I am needed."

"Ne'er fear but the ol' man will stand up to his post. If you are gone overlong he will not shirk his duty. Mebbe you had better trail the idee with 'em in the house, and, mind you, they are ne'er to leave their post so long as I am here. Do you trail that thought, lad?"

"I do, Woodranger. If you think it is the best plan I will hasten to them at once, with this understanding."

"Aweel, now's me, lad, I ne'er dissemble the truth. It may be risky —"

In the midst of his speech, as if it had suddenly occurred to him that his meaning might be misconstrued, he hastened to say:

"I mean — that is, I read — nay, lad, how my ol' tongue stumbles, like a river that has been trigged. I — there be personal p'ints in this amazement. Go, lad, go! afore you see the ol' man commit some blameful indiscretion. Tell 'em to stay under kiver, and there'll be no brown-faces climbing yon rocky path. But make 'em swear to this, lad, on their honour."

Ben, noticing that the Woodranger was under some powerful influence which might be governing his words, promised all he asked, and the next

moment was climbing hastily the way to the Look-out.

He found the three occupants anxiously awaiting his return, and in a few words he explained the necessity, as he felt, of returning to the camp, and also the promise of the Woodranger to remain on duty at the foot of the cliff until he could come back with the others to take them away from the place if they desired to go. He was careful not to mention the name of the Woodranger, speaking of him simply as an old scout, who was sure to do all he undertook.

"I wish we could see him for a few minutes," said Mrs. Briant. "It would be better for all concerned."

Ben evaded this request, and after exacting a pledge from Indian Plume not to leave the dwelling until she should be requested to do so, he stood ready to bid them good-bye.

"I will accept your terms," said the maid, "upon the condition I be allowed to use my discretion after three days."

"I will be back with companions before that time," replied Ben, little dreaming what he was to go through in that time.

With the sincere godspeed of the three ringing in his ears, Ben left the house, Indian Plume following him to the door, where she stood until he

had passed out of sight. But the young Ranger did not go directly on his way, or this tale might have had a different ending. It happens sometimes that matters of seemingly trivial importance become powerful factors in shaping future affairs. Thus it is always well for us to look carefully after the performance of little duties, as they go so far in making up the sum and substance of success in life.

As Ben stepped out into the night scene, the Sergeant, still at his post, rose to his feet and turned about to look longingly toward him. Having a strong liking for the intelligent animal, as every one who knew him did have, the young Ranger crossed the opening to his side, and, patting him on his head, said gently:

"Noble old Sergeant, I do not believe there is any need for you to stay here longer. The enemy have gone."

Then the faithful dog licked his hand, and murmured his pleasure in his way, and wagged his tail with evident delight. So, when Ben started down the path, Sergeant followed him unopposed.

"I do not like this way of leaving you, Woodranger," said Ben, as he approached the canoe, "but it seems all that I can do. But I promise to return as soon as possible to relieve you."

"Ne'er worrit o'er the ol' man. He has a bit o'

dried meat in his wallet, and a goodish stock o' powder and ball. So follow your trail, lad, and let no wanton indiscretion cross your path."

Clasping the hand of the Woodranger for a moment, Ben then pushed the canoe out into the deeper water and sprang in. A minute later he was speeding lightly away from the rocky shore over the trackless path leading to his destination. Looking back for a last glance at the forester, he was surprised to find that Sergeant had entered the water, and was swimming closely in his wake.

"Go back, Sergeant!" he said. "You must stay with the Woodranger."

This seemed far from the intention of the dog, and for the first time Sergeant showed an utter disregard for a command given him. If anything, he swam faster than before upon the course of the canoe. Finding that he could not make him go back, Ben called for the Woodranger to speak to him, thinking he might be able to stop the creature from running away.

The forester did speak once to the swimming dog, but seeing that his words had no effect, he said:

"Let him go with you, lad. He seeks his master, which I hol' be a goodish trait in a servant. It may be he is proper and we are picking up ticklish sign with a wanton waste o' jedgment. Let

the Sergeant go to his master. He may be needed. I can see without his eyes, and hear without his ears. Ay, lad, let the dog go with you, and ne'er blame him for his prudishness."

Having come to this conclusion, Ben resolved to make it as easy as he could for Sergeant, and so he helped him into the canoe, where the dog rested contentedly, while the young rower sent the light craft swiftly over the clear water that scarcely rippled with its sharp prow.

Ben realized that he was likely to encounter many perils on his way to the camp of General Johnson, and he was fully resolved not to run headlong into any danger. It was his intention to so shape his course that he could reach the shore of the lake so as to gain the old trail that followed closely to the shore. The Sergeant, as if alive to the situation, soon left the bottom of the canoe, and with his fore paws resting on the bow he lifted his head so his keen vision swept the scene ahead as far as the dim light of the night could carry the eye.

Somewhat of an enthusiast over the charms of the wildwood and the waters, Ben could not be otherwise than deeply impressed with the lonely grandeur of his environments. With its wealth of sparkling waters, its numerous islands, one for every day in the year, and its frame of mountains garnished with forests in varying shades of green,

with a northern sky smiling down upon it, this beautiful sheet of water is perhaps the most charming lake in America. Coupled with this fact it is the most historical, where many of the most stirring scenes of the war which was to settle the supremacy of the British or the French in this country took place. It was into the heart of these scenes that Ben was sending his canoe.

Then how much more impressive must have been the view to him as he dared its perils and sought its primeval glories. The mountains had faded into shadowy shapes, and the forests into dark cloaks wrapped closely about their giant forms and buttoned with black cliffs. Over the water, as over the sky, lay a tranquil calm, black lines in the distance showing where the two met. The meek-eyed stars looking softly down upon the scene left their pictures there.

His mind busy with emotions natural to one under such conditions, while he continued to ply the paddle with swift and rugged strokes, Ben was abruptly brought to a full realization of his situation by a low growl from Sergeant, who with less regard for his surroundings had more earnest watchfulness over his immediate condition. Then, too, to give Ben all the credit he deserved, the Sergeant had nothing else to do but to watch. Confident that he would not give a warning with-

out sufficient reason, the young Ranger quickly checked his rapid advance, and, allowing the canoe to move more leisurely, he took a hurried survey of the scene.

At first Ben was inclined to think that Sergeant had given a false alarm, for look where he would, not a moving object dotted the watery expanse. Scarcely a breath of air stirred the foliage on the nearest isle which thrust its head above the water like a big pincushion filled with huge pins. He was about to resume his paddling, thinking the dog had sniffed some strange scent wafted hither from one of the islands, when from around the jagged shoulder of one of these selfsame islands the prow of an Indian canoe shot into sight.

It was near enough for him to discern at least a dozen dusky figures ranged along its sides, while it was being propelled by strong hands. Sergeant gave another growl and, as if aware of the danger into which they were going, sank lower in the canoe, but without relaxing his watch of the enemy.

Ben saw that it was a critical time for him. It is true he might turn back, but even if that should ensure his escape, he had no desire to abandon his purpose of reaching the English camp. Then he quickly resolved upon following what he believed to be his best course. This was to veer to his

right, and pass up on the other side of the island. He hoped he could gain the cover of its shadows before he was discovered by the boat-load of Hurons, as he judged the oncoming party to be.

But he soon found that he was not quick enough to do this, for a prolonged yell from throats that seemed to be lined with iron or copper rang over the water with a sharpness and distinctness which sent a shiver of horror through his frame. He plied his paddle with redoubled energy, and as he sped around the end of the island his last view of his enemies showed that they were approaching at a furious rate.

The island Ben was now passing proved to be long and narrow, and wooded to the edge of the water. He found also that the water was dotted in this vicinity with smaller isles, the majority of which were covered with thick growths. It was thus darker here than at any previous section of his journey. This fact, however, gave him courage, for he believed he would be the better able to elude his foes in the darkness thrown over the lake by the evergreen foliage covering the patches of land. He could hear nothing of his enemies on the other side of the island, and unless they should turn back so as to intercept his passage, he fondly believed he would be able to escape them. Even if they should undertake this manœuvre he hoped yet to

outwit them by seeking the cover of some of the other isles.

These thoughts were suddenly and rudely shattered by another warning note from the Sergeant, who was his watchman. Looking up with a feeling of fear at his heart, Ben now discovered another canoe bearing down upon him from the space ahead. It was nearer than the first, and coming directly toward him upon that side of the island. He was certain it was not the canoe he had first seen, for this was smaller, and it was near enough for him to discern the uniform of a French officer standing in the middle of the boat.

The occupants of this canoe discovered him at the same moment he had seen them, and though no outcry was given, he heard the sharp voice of the white commander telling his men, who were mostly Indians, to row faster, and not let the English scout escape.

Ben's heart came into his mouth, as the expression goes, and for a moment he felt that he was lost. But he was still resolved to make a desperate effort to elude his pursuers, and so he again changed his course to try to put another island between him and his enemies.

This time they were so near that they opened fire upon him, a volley of bullets whistling over his head in dangerous proximity. The next

minute, before they could reload their firearms, he was out of their range. Yet this island was smaller than the other, and he knew if the enemy should retrace their course so as to come around the upper end, his flight would be stopped in that direction.

"Look sharp for them, Sergeant," he said, while he bent all of his efforts toward sending the canoe through the water.

The shots of the nearest party was answered by another yell from the canoe-load in the distance. These, no doubt, were doing their best to lend their assistance to the French officer and his followers. This outcry had barely died away before Ben heard, with renewed dread, the war-cry of yet a third party located somewhere in the distance ahead behind the islands whose cover he was hoping to gain. For a little time the stout heart of brave Ben Browne quailed, and he felt that it was useless for him to keep on.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SERGEANT SAVES BEN — SCENES AT THE CAMP

BEN knew it was all to gain or all to lose with him. To falter for a moment meant capture by an enemy that knew neither mercy nor the code of honour. Better far for him to die in an attempt to escape than to become a captive. His gun lay close beside him, ready for immediate use, and once more he sheered to his right, sending his canoe ahead with strokes that fairly lifted it from the water.

"Don't let him escape!" cried the officer. "Stop, sir! or we will fill you with lead."

The young Ranger made no reply to this, save to continue his efforts; his lips compressed till the blood almost came through, and the muscles upon his hands stood out like whip-cords.

He had been close to the isle when he discovered this second party of foes, and in changing his advance he passed so near the shore that the overhanging branches of the trees whipped him in the face, and brought a howl of pain from the Sergeant. Despite this, Ben bent lower over his paddle and

sped on. Three or four shots barely missed him, and he could hear the enemy in stubborn pursuit.

As he sent the light canoe speeding over the water, the young Ranger could hear the Sergeant lashing his side with his tail, and knew the dog was thoroughly alive to the situation. Another series of yells ringing from the first party he had seen made the night hideous with its frightful menace of passion and hatred. Then, a briefer but not less demoniacal reply came from the distance ahead. Truly it seemed as if enemies were in every quarter, and turn whither he would he was sure to run into them. In the short interval of his flight many thoughts flashed through Ben's mind, and he thought of home, and mother, and loved ones, believing that his race would soon be over.

He was following now a narrow channel between two islands, the smaller one being upon his left. This was the isle separating him from his foes in the canoe in which the French officer was commander. He feared this party more than the other, for their shots had been made with closer precision. So now he decided to turn around the longer island, hoping that, once behind that, he would be able to escape. He could hear his pursuers close behind him, and just as he reached the end of the island a volley of bullets whistled

through the air, though missing him by three or four yards.

It must not be supposed that Ben was as skilled with the use of the paddle as the Woodranger, nor yet as adept as William Stark, or many of the Rangers, who had spent more of their time in following in their intricate windings the streams of Northern New England by means of the light skiff, of which the Indian could rightfully claim the credit of being the inventor. But the present exciting strain, it is safe to say, lent him both strength and skill. Under his powerful strokes the canoe fairly flew around the corner of rocky earth, forming the extreme point of the island, fringed to the water's edge by bushes.

Hugging closely to the shore, both for the protection of the growth and the shortening of his route, Ben suddenly found himself confronted by the third boat-load of Indians under the command of a French officer.

So silently and swiftly had this party rushed forward to join in the capture, that now the canoe was in reach of Ben's paddle!

The surprise was mutual, for the allied forces had not dreamed of the close proximity of the fugitive, for it must be remembered that, while some of his enemies were making the scene ring with

furious demonstrations of excitement, Ben was fleeing in silence.

Ben recovered from the surprise first, and with rare presence of mind he turned the prow of his canoe in season to avert a collision with the other. But he realized it was impossible for him to escape by flight. A dozen firearms were already being raised against him, and the sharp order of the leader rang out:

"Stop or —"

Resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible, Ben was dropping his paddle in the bottom of the canoe to take up in its place his gun, when he saw the Sergeant crouching for a spring, and before he could have stopped him, if he would, the form of the agile dog shot through the air.

In defiance of the dozen firearms pointing their deadly muzzles toward him, the gallant Sergeant cleared the space between the two canoes, to land upon the breast of the officer.

Giving a sharp cry of mingled pain and terror, the French commander reeled back, and, carried down by the force of the sudden assault that had been made upon him, fell into the midst of his followers. What a medley of cries and confusion followed! The canoe rocked, and some of the dusky soldiers tumbled overboard into the water. Others, in their wild efforts to escape the attacks

of the four-footed enemy, caused the birch skiff to overturn, when the whole party, the dog still in their midst, began a struggle in the water.

Fortunately for Ben, the impetus given his canoe when Sergeant made his furious bound toward the enemy carried it ahead instead of sidewise, so by the time the officer and his crew were capsized, the young Ranger found himself a dozen yards away, and, what was of equal importance to him, right side up with care. He lost no time in improving his opportunity, and he was soon speeding the canoe from the scene with all the strength of his good right arm. With this party out of the pursuit, he felt confidence in his ability to escape.

Thus, with renewed hope, he sped on and on, until the cries of his discomfited enemies were no longer to be heard. He now slackened his speed; in fact, he came to a stop, looking anxiously back, while he wondered what had become of his brave friend who had saved his life at the critical moment.

The Sergeant was nowhere to be seen or heard. He called his name softly, not daring to speak in a louder key, but no response came to him.

"Noble fellow!" he thought. "I shall feel badly if he has been killed. It was a fight for me."

The network of islands from out of which he had just come formed a continuous breastwork of

land as they appeared in the distance, their outlines running together in what seemed to be a solid mass.

"I would go back if I dared," he mused; "but it would be running into the jaws of the enemy. If I only knew the Sergeant's fate, I should feel easier. I suppose I ought to have stopped sooner. This running away looks so cowardly. He never ran away from a friend!"

So Ben, his mind filled with conflicting thoughts, not all of which were pleasant, lingered in the vicinity as long as he dared. He even retraced his course a few hundred yards, but he could not ascertain anything in regard to the fate of Sergeant. Finally, knowing it would be not only useless but dangerous for him to remain there longer, he again moved up the lake, increasing the progress of his flight as he measured mile after mile of the crystal Horican with his paddle.

Leaving Ben to follow his lonely course, assured now of his comparative safety, let us return to William Stark and other scenes which demand attention in order to understand better the series of adventures upon which the fortunes of our friends depend.

Philip, the friendly Sokokis, reached the camp of General Johnson at the head of the Horican, where the British commander had pitched his tents and begun work upon a fleet of bateaux with which

to move against the allied enemies about sunset. Though the Sabbath had been a peaceful day as far as the weather was concerned, it had not been wholly a day of rest amid the bustle and excitement of this camp in the wilderness. War sadly desecrates the better sentiments of man, and stalks grimly into home and church, a spectre of lost hopes. Parson Williams had barely completed his sermon to the soldiers of Fort George before the lithe, dusky scout burst upon the scene with the announcement that Baron Dieskau, at the head of nearly four thousand men, was marching upon Fort Lyman. At last the sluggish British commander was made to realize that the hour of action was near at hand.

Knowing that Fort Lyman was ill prepared to meet such an attack, and that its seizure by the French would be a serious menace to his safety, General Johnson immediately called for a volunteer to carry a despatch to its commander with all haste possible. A wagoner, named Charley Adams, quickly offered his services, and, mounted upon one of the best horses to be found, started upon his perilous mission. More perilous than many dreamed, for soon after his departure the entire camp rested upon its arms.

In the meantime, as it has been partly shown, the French commander, a German baron named

Dieskau, had been pushing resolutely forward in the determined purpose of surprising and routing the English and New England troops. One of Baron Dieskau's greatest sources of trouble was his Indian allies, who gave him no end of trouble, and as much as anything, perhaps, caused him to be continually on the move. To stop was like sitting down on a hornets' nest, for they gave him no rest nor peace, but were always calling on him for something to eat or something to do in the way of amusement, but never of work. Harassed thus by his own followers, the commander moved up the waterway, until he had reached the head of South Bay. Here he abandoned his canoes, and started upon a march toward Fort Lyman, confident that he would be able to complete his premeditated surprise. A prisoner captured a few days before had told him an ingenious falsehood regarding the true situation at the head of the "carrying-place," and he was made more anxious than ever to move against it.

Thus, the evening upon which the little party of refugees were resting so anxiously at the Lookout, when Ben was having his exciting experience upon the Horican, Philip had entered General Johnson's camp with his announcement, and Charley Adams was on his way to carry the news of the expected attack of the French and Indians, that body of

allied forces encamped upon the road leading to Fort Lyman and only three miles distant.

They had barely halted for their brief rest before marching upon the fort ahead, when the clatter of horse's hoofs coming down the road aroused the Indian sentinels. Some of these sprang into covert by the roadside, to await the oncoming rider.

He was the brave Charley Adams who had undertaken to carry the message of alarm to Fort Lyman, and, unconscious of the trap into which he was running, he dashed smartly ahead to make up for the few minutes he had recently lost in trying to dissuade some unfaithful wagoners to return back to the camp. These had rebelled against the orders of General Johnson, and were determined to leave the camp with their teams.

"You are making a serious mistake," declared the messenger. "Every man is needed now at the front. Besides, you are likely to run upon the French at any moment. I am now on my way to warn Fort Lyman of danger from the approaching army."

"A plug of wood for Dieskau and all of his red imps!" cried the leader of the dissatisfied wagoners. "The same, too, for Johnson. I, for one, am tired of the whole rabble and am going to get back to Albany just as quick as these half-starved hosses can get me there."

A cheer from his followers told Charley Adams that it was useless for him to waste his time with them. Aye, though unconscious of it then, he had already lost time that would cost him his life. Had he kept on without delay, he might have escaped the attack of his enemies. As it was, a few minutes later, he ran into the ambush set for him, and was shot down like a dog.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AMBUSCADES

William Stark, having spent some time in reconnoitring the enemy's line, was then on his way to warn his companions at Fort Lyman of the peril threatening them, and the shot which killed Charley Adams arrested his advance. Crawling forward upon his hands and knees, he was in season to see the Indians searching the clothes of the brave messenger, the slayer having appropriated his scalp. Among other things that they found was the letter written by General Jackson to Colonel Blanchard.

This aroused the impetuous Stark, and for a while he was more than half-inclined to throw himself against the allied enemies. But, of course, he quickly realized that this would be the most foolish act he could do. So, with a last look of pity for the unfortunate man, he started ahead with more haste than formerly to reach Fort Lyman.

Stark had not gone far, and the French and Indians were still exulting over their success in

obtaining this secret of their enemy's movements, when the rumble of wagon wheels was heard in the distance. The encampment instantly became quiet, and along the road ranged the Indians in ambush for the newcomers, whomever they should be.

One of these was to prove an old acquaintance of ours, none other than Lige Bitlock, who had parted with Stark a short time before to go on to General Johnson's camp with news of the enemy's intended raid. The Ranger had stumbled upon the deserting wagoners, who gave him glowing accounts of their plans, and how easy it would be for them to reach Albany, where they would have a fine time and escape the hardships of war. The truth told, Lige had some time since repented of his decision to join Rogers' Rangers, and here he believed was a fine chance to get away. So he readily fell in with the invitation to join these mutinous drivers, and inside of five minutes after meeting them he was riding beside one of the drivers, and going in an opposite direction from the British camp.

Lige was feeling in high spirits, and he was telling the driver beside him of his wonderful adventures about home, when he treed a catamount and then climbed the tree to pull the creature down.

"B'gosh!" he said, "the boys jes' said I

darsn't do yit, an' I says, says I, 'Jumpin' junipers! I'll show ye.' Then I went up thet air chestnut like a squirrel, an' thet cat seein' me comin' skid up higher 's fast 's I went. I knowed I'd got to ketch th' creetur' or th' boys 'd larf at me. So I spit on my hands an' clum' 's I'd never clum' afore. I could see thet air cat's tail a-stickin' out erbout a foot, an' 's big's a hoss's tail with th' mane throwed in.

"I could hear th' boys cacklin' like hens, an' kept on clum'in' with my hand jes' ahint thet cat's long tail. I s'pose th' fool cat got s' 'cited like, for ye may take me fer yer ramrod if it didn't keep right on clum'in' till it got up where th' blamed branches o' thet chestnut were too ticklish to hol' a spider. I wasn't to be outdone by enny goldurned wildcat with sich a measly look, an' without lettin' I knowed how it was foolin' itself I clum' right arter it. But I went so tarnel quick 'em leetle twigs jes' hild their heads right up till I'd got both feet half a yard 'bove the last one, an'—"

Lige never told just what happened then, or if he got the wildcat or not, for at that moment a terrific yell came from the concealed red men, and a volley of shot rattled about the wagons in the lead. The driver beside Lige was killed, and the boastful Ranger leaped high enough into the air to have caught that cat if it had been above him, while

"FELL UPON HIS KNEES AND BEGGED FOR HIS LIFE."

he sent up a shriek of terror which drowned the war-cries of the Indians.

Of the dozen drivers, five were shot, five escaped by flight, and two were captured, together with Lige Bitlock, who fell upon his knees and begged for his life. One of the captors lifted his tomahawk and would have brained the hapless fellow then and there, had not another interfered, saying:

"He little-wit — head all empty!"

Indians always respected or had sympathy for the foolish, and so Lige Bitlock's life was spared. But the youth suffered fearful agony over what he imagined fate had in store for him. Nor did he have less reason than he supposed for his fears. Indians upon the war-path were always to be dreaded as the worst enemies one could meet. It was then all the ferocious traits coming from savage life reigned, and these Hurons with a sprinkling of Iroquois allied with the French were no exception. In fact, future events were to prove that the fiendishness of their nature was aroused to a pitch often beyond control by their white commanders. Lige, however, for the time, was left to his own reflections.

The other captives were closely questioned, and they both declared that the British and New Englanders were encamped at the head of the lake in

great numbers. The Indians then asked them if the palefaces had many cannons, and upon being told that they did not, while there were many at Fort Lyman, they openly declared that they would join in an attack against this body of whites, but would not go on to meet the "big guns" of Fort Lyman. Baron Dieskau knew that they had a great dread of cannon, and finding his remonstrances lost upon them, he consented to assault the camp at Lake George, though it was expected that he would be outnumbered. The British regulars were objects of ridicule to the Indians, while the raw New England troops were held up to French scorn, so, with the enthusiasm of a victory over Braddock, recently acquired, the French had courage to push forward to what was to prove the crucial battle in the campaign.

"The more there are of them," said Baron Dieskau to his Canadian allies, both white and red, "the more scalps there will be to carry home."

The order was then given to break camp, and inside of an hour the allied forces were marching under the lofty pines toward the lake. As they advanced the ground grew more rugged, and soon they entered a wild ravine where it was too dark to see more than the shadowy outlines of the marching men, and the only sound that fell on the scene,

except the steady tread of moving feet, was the tinkle, tinkle of murmuring waters winding along the rocky bed of a small stream. The road was narrow, so the Indians and Canadians spread out through the growth.

A couple of scouts, sent ahead to reconnoitre the way, came back with a captive, who boldly avowed that the English were approaching in full force, having been told by the escaped wagoners that the French and Indians were planning to march against them. With the boldness and rapidity of his nature, Dieskau quickly decided to prepare an ambuscade for the oncoming army.

The situation was all that could be desired for such a purpose. They were still about three miles from the shore of the lake, but through the rifts in the tree-tops could be seen the rocky height of French Mountain, while nearer rose the more gentle slopes of West Mountain. Here the Canadians and Indians sought cover behind the trees and bushes, every man with firearm ready for instant use, while he crouched like a human tiger and waited in breathless silence for the first sound of the expected troops. The French regulars, trained in the most approved tactics of war at that period, were stationed along the road, guns cocked, every emotion held in abeyance, as all listened for the

tread of that soldiery expected to march unsuspecting into this deadly snare laid to entrap it.

Called back to the scene of the French encampment by the attack made upon the wagoners, William Stark, lying in a neighbouring thicket, witnessed something of the incidents that followed. He realized that some change was taking place in the plans of the commander, and in order to satisfy himself what that might mean, he followed the allied forces for a short distance, or nearly back to the gorge where they laid their ambush for the expected army under General Johnson. He was now confident that the designs upon Fort Lyman had been abandoned, and that an attack upon the British camp at the head of the Horican was premeditated. Accordingly he started at once for that place.

CHAPTER XV.

"THE BLOODY MORNING SCOUT"

UPON receiving the intelligence from the wagoners that the French, with their allies, were upon the war-trail heading toward Fort Lyman, General Johnson called a council, which decided that immediate action should be taken against them. Including the Indians, the force consisted of about twenty-five hundred men. It was decided that five hundred of these should march toward South Bay, in the direction whence the French had come, and that another body of equal size should start to the assistance of Fort Lyman.

This last body was to include a contingency of Mohawks under the leadership of him who may truthfully be said to have been the last of the Mohican chiefs. This brave old chieftain, who had figured in many stirring scenes in years gone by, did not present the picture of an ideal warrior. Added to the burden of his years was a large surplus of flesh which made it difficult for him to get about. He was also a great sufferer from a wound he had received in former encounters, while his

eyesight was somewhat impaired. But if weakened physically, the old chief still retained the wisdom and much of the spiritual fire of his vigorous manhood.

When it was approved by the council that such small forces should be sent out upon such hazardous marches, leaving more able-bodied men behind to do nothing, the Mohawk, whose name was Hendrick, picked up a stick which he broke with ease. Then, taking half a dozen, he laid them together, and showed that they could not be broken in that manner. The officers could not fail to see and understand the truth of the old chief's suggestion, and it was decided to unite the two companies, and send this body toward Fort Lyman. Even this did not satisfy the astute Mohawk, who shook his head slowly, saying:

"Too many if they are to be killed; too few if they are to fight."

Despite his well-grounded fears, Hendrick, the hero of half a hundred battles, was not inclined to let his warriors take the war-trail while he remained behind. Climbing, with considerable difficulty, a gun-carriage, he addressed his warriors in one of the most eloquent and stirring speeches ever made, in which he pictured in glowing terms the duty that lay before them. The result was that over two hundred of his warriors joined the

ill-fated expedition. General Johnson loaned him a horse to ride, and thus mounted he rode at the head of his column of followers decked out in war-paint and feathers.

While there is something grand and awe-inspiring in the sight of a column of marching men, there is a pathetic association belonging to the picture. Most especially was this true of the little body of troops that left the camp of Lake George about eight o'clock upon the fateful morning of September 8th, when General Johnson sent forth a thousand of his men upon what has passed into history as "the bloody morning scout."

The regiment of white men was made up of New England yeomanry, under the command of Colonel Williams, of Connecticut, with a good second in Lieutenant-Colonel Whiting. Without dreaming of the fearful danger into which they were marching, this body, with the Mohawks under Hendrick, marched silently, but rapidly, on their way. The foe was not supposed to be within several miles, and thus no scouts were sent in advance, nor were there any to cover their flank.

Suddenly Hendrick, who was riding close to the front, detected the movement of a twig beside the path. He had scarcely discovered this, and had not been able to give the alarm before the report of a gun rang out with the stunning effect of a

peal of thunder from a clear sky. Then an Iroquois warrior sprang into his path, and, outstretching his hands to show friendliness, demanded:

"Whence came you?"

Recognizing the speaker as belonging to a tribe friendly to his, but some of whose warriors had been won over to the French, he replied:

"My brother knows I came from the Mohawks. From whence came he?"

"From Montreal."

The dialogue was brought to an abrupt termination, and the friendly intention of the Iroquois was ended by the discharge of a volley of musketry. One of these shots struck Hendrick, and the brave Mohawk fell from his horse to rise no more. Wild with the excitement of his death, his followers gave expression to wild cries of revenge, which were answered by the Iroquois, and the battle was on.

Realizing the trap into which they had fallen, and knowing it was a death-grapple, the New England men entered the combat with the wild determination to meet fate fighting their fiercest. The annals of Indian warfare show no more bitter contest than that waged here. Early in the struggle the leader of the Iroquois, Legardeur de St. Pierre, who was a veteran of many fierce bush fights, fell mortally wounded, and died soon after.

Colonel Williams, urging on his men with great bravery, rushed forward to gain the little summit where stands the boulder that was to become his monument, and was seen to stagger and reel in his advance. Another shot struck him in the brain, and he went down to lead his brave men no more. Beside him fell many of his gallant followers, while those behind dashed forward to take the place of their fallen comrades.

At the moment of the discharge of the gun which was fired to warn the aged Mohawk chief of the peril of himself and comrades, but which became the signal of battle, Ben Browne, whom we have lost sight of since the night before, when we left him on his journey across the lake to the English camp, was within close proximity, rapidly threading his way toward his destination entirely unconscious of the ambuscade he was running into until that moment. Even then it was so still for a brief while that he fancied it was only the random shot of some one abroad with less show of discretion than he should display considering the situation.

But before Ben had begun to beat a retreat, the volley of shots followed, and he suddenly found himself surrounded by enemies. Without stopping to fire a shot in return, he dropped flat upon the ground, and then he began to crawl backward out

of what he had found to be an ugly predicament. Every bush and tree seemed to send forth its foeman, until the whole woods were fairly alive with the dancing fiends. Sheets of flame flashed and reflashed upon the horrid scene, and the roar of the firearms became deafening.

Seeing a thicket of ground-hemlock encircling the foot of a big pine, Ben thought to gain its cover by a swift dash in that direction. He reached the place only to find himself met by three dusky Iroquois who rose in his pathway like grim avengers from some dark cavern.

"Houha! houha!" yelled the red men, thrusting their firearms into his face.

Ben dashed these aside just as they were discharged, and taking hasty aim with his own weapon pulled the trigger. One of the Indians dropped, but the others, with rage over the fate of their companion, brandished their guns and struck at him with all their strength. These blows Ben managed to dodge, and, clubbing his own musket, he tried to beat them off. Finding that he could not do that, and that the fight was becoming more fierce all around him, the young Ranger beat a precipitate retreat. Howling like madmen, the Indians gave pursuit.

Such a race could not last long. Ben was so close upon the hiding-places of the enemies that, turn

whither he would, it was only to be met by, not one, but half a dozen of them! Farther up the valley he knew the battle was raging wilder and fiercer than ever. His sole chance lay in going in the direction of the lake. He regretted now he had left it at all, but he had felt that the woods were safer than the water. When it was too late he saw his mistake.

However, Ben was not one to repine, even if he had had more time in which to do it, and resolved to clear his way through the howling mob or die in the attempt. He swung his musket over his head, and brought it down with telling effect upon the nearest Iroquois. Then he sprang with all his weight and strength against the second foe. This one he doubled up like a jack-knife, but before he could rally to meet the next, he was hurled to the ground in a heap. A thousand stars seemed to dance before his eyes, and then it became dark.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DANGER-LINE

LEAVING further description of these exciting scenes to another chapter, let us return to see how it is faring with those at the Lookout. The Wood-ranger, it will be remembered, was on guard at the foot of the cliff, where he could command an extended view of the placid lake, and at the same time remain unseen himself. He had taken his position behind two huge fragments of rock, which had been hurled at some time by some mighty convulsion of nature from the height above. So nicely had they been dropped there that the two stood as one, with simply a seam-like crevice between them running from top to bottom. About three feet from the base, where a piece had been chipped out of one, an aperture about the size of a hand had been left. Through this any one behind the barrier could look out upon the water without his presence being known to one outside. The end of the upper rock fitted so tightly against the side of the perpendicular cliff that there was no escape on that side. At the opposite end was an opening about two feet

in width. The narrow path winding upward to the rocky plateau, which was the site of the stone house, ran close to this place, and was barely wide enough for three to pass abreast.

The brief description is necessary in order to understand the following scenes of thrilling interest, when the brave forester made one of the most determined defences of human life ever undertaken.

He was behind this barrier when Ben Browne entered the canoe and paddled away on his journey to the English camp at the head of the lake, and he watched the young Ranger with close attention until he disappeared in the distance.

"Aweel, now's me," he murmured, "the lad do handle his paddle with discretion, both as to the saving grace o' his arm and the watchful care o' the inemy that canna be far away. I'm a'most afeerd the lad will run into an amazement that'll tie his skein into hard knots. But hear this ol' babbling brook in my head running away with itself, for a' the worl' like childish prattle. It must be a weakness that comes with the years. Now hear me prate o' weakness, when the time has come that calls for a' the strength that manhood can give! I ne'er expected to see this hour, and I durst not lift a finger or speak a word. If it be right, then it be true; if it be true, then it be right. I durst not open my mouth to her to-day. To-mor-

row, it may be, I'll be stronger. But first I must hol' converse with the breeze which has loved a thousand times, and lost. I must trail thought with the laughing water, that has been jilted over and again for all the love it has given. I must commune with the stars that are as constant as the days o' time. Nay, now I'm minded, sich be not for me, a mortal, to unravel thought. The mood o' the pine suits me nearest. That has been constant, too, but unlike the star it forgets. It whispers love to the dancing naiads o' the water, and swears eternal fidelity. The next moment it laughs in the arms o' the south wind, and coyly whispers it tender promises.

"To-night the stars look down through its matted branches and whisper, 'Mary!' The wavelets, beating their endless symphony, murmur, 'Mary!' I hear it in the breath o' the wanton breeze, 'Mary!' All natur' sings the name, the sweetest in human speech, the name which has been locked in my heart a prisoner for more than thirty years, and all the long, weary time the finger o' silence lay on the lip o' natur'. Now, here, where man has scarce left his imprint, she has come to me, and all the ol' dream comes floating back with her. Again I feel her head resting on my breast, as it did on that fair evening when we plighted our troth for life. Ay, it was for life, let 'em say

what they will. To-night she is so near I durst not go to her! I durst not speak her name above a whisper, but I will try again and again. To-morrow I will have better the trailing o' it, and mebbe, mind you, I do not say this as prophet might, to-morrow I may have tongue to speak it aloud. Then, in spite o' my weakness, I will go to her, and if she be kind, and the way — hush! what foolish whim has now unsettled this ol' head grown gray before its time? It might be better for her if I perambulated this hour — "

While indulging in this rambling soliloquy, which expressed so forcibly the deep emotions striving for the supremacy in his heart, true to the long training he had received as a forest scout, he had not let his eye leave the expanse of water glistening under the stars like a foil of silver. In the midst of his speech an object had caught his attention. It was only a speck far out on the water, and yet within a minute it had grown in size — moved — come nearer.

" Take on the sight o' your 'arly years, when noonday sun ne'er sent you skurrying to some corner, ol' eyes. That be an amazement calling for discretionary notions. If they be white, they do trail 'mazing slow. Nay, they be brown-faces. Ol' Danger," tapping the stock of his long, serviceable firearm, which he had carried for many years,

and which bore unmistakable evidence of its faithfulness, "unlimber your tongue, and be ready to make your presentation speech."

Relapsing into silence, the Woodranger stood motionless at his post for several minutes, his eye watching carefully the approach of the strange canoe. Somewhat to his surprise, this finally veered to the right, and began to move directly toward the shore.

"They don't mean to land there," mused the forester. "That be a ruse."

So he continued his watch until at last the canoe and its occupants disappeared from his view behind a point of rocks some distance up the shore of the lake. But he did not relax his vigilance, though he made the rocky shore line now his objective sight.

Ten minutes must have passed in silence, and without any indication of the presence of any one within a mile, when a smile overspread the weather-beaten countenance of the scout.

"I opined as much, I swan I did," he said, in his peculiar manner of addressing himself. While he spoke, he emphasized the importance of his thoughts by slowly raising the firearm he had been holding in his hands in readiness for use to a level with the opening in the wall. He was crouching upon one knee and foot, his eye riveted upon the

scene without, until the lines of his face became more tense, and the fingers closed tighter about the hammer of the weapon.

The canoe had reappeared upon the orbit of his vision, this time keeping close in to the rocky shore, while it slowly and cautiously advanced under the shadows of the overhanging growth, whose branches at places lapped the water like thirsty fowl. He could count six men, four of whom were busy plying their paddles, while one sat in the stern, guiding the course of the little craft, and the sixth stood bolt upright in the prow, peering ahead with the earnestness of a watchman.

The Woodranger knew they were not in sight of those in the Lookout, and he quickly surmised the little party was planning a surprise for those there, little dreaming of his close proximity.

They were now near enough for him to see that they wore the paint and feathers of a war-party, whose purpose was only too plain for him.

"If you durst pass that p'int o' rock, ol' paint and feathers," murmured the forester, "it'll be the longest trail you e'er took, and I ne'er claim to be taken for a prophet."

The steady approach to this fatal spot was clearly shown by the continued uplifting of his gun by the Woodranger, until its ominous muzzle looked with

a grim stare in the direction of the unsuspecting voyagers.

High up on the mountain, from its elevated perch upon some crag, the sharp cry of a lonely night-bird at that moment rang shrilly on the scene. It was the first sound that had broken the stillness of the hour, and came with such a startling distinctness that for a moment the rowers of the canoe ceased their efforts. The man in the prow peered more sharply down the shore, and then, as if satisfied with his survey, signalled to his companions to resume their efforts.

"Aweel!" murmured the forester, "it did trail clus to natur', clus to natur', so clus that the chief be fooled. It must have been the lass, and it shows that she be on the watch, and wished me to know that the amazement is clus by. If I did not need the warning, I feel none the less thankful for her cunning. It tells to me, too, that she be not in the stone jug. Howbeit, here's the 'p'inted time, ol' Danger!"

The Indians in the canoe had indeed reached the place selected by the Woodranger as the danger-line, and without longer delay he took swift aim and fired.

The report of the weapon had barely ascended the mountainside with its far-reaching intonations

before the chief threw up his arms, and plunged head first into the water.

The surprise of his companions was expressed in a series of wild war-whoops that echoed and re-echoed up and down the shore with prolonged declarations of fiendish hate.

These had not died away before the Woodranger had reloaded his gun, and stood ready to make his second shot if he thought it was necessary.

Evidently fearing other shots, the five surviving Indians quickly retraced their course several rods, when they paused as if to hold a council of war.

The Woodranger improved this respite to lay his powder and bullets in such a manner as to facilitate the reloading of his weapon in case he should be sorely pressed by his enemies.

Fifteen minutes or more passed in silence, and without a move on the part of the Indians. Then the solitary watcher saw the boat start swiftly down the shore, hugging closer in to the rocks frowning down on the lake than before.

The bronze on the Woodranger's countenance lightened for a moment, though the lines about his mouth became compressed, the simple utterance "Aweel!" trembling on his lips.

Old Danger's big, single eye again looked up the shore without blinking. The red men had evidently hoped to pass the point this time without

being molested. If so, they counted without their host.

No sooner had the prow of the canoe crossed the imaginary line fixed by the forester than he took deliberate aim and fired again.

The resonant yell of his victim, no less than his wild leap into the air, told of its result. Old Danger had scored another victim.

This time, instead of stopping and turning back, the remaining foemen sent the canoe ahead at more furious strokes, and before the Woodranger could reload his firearm, they had come within close range, and seemed likely to reach the landing-place at the foot of the path.

Then another report pealed forth its warning of peril, and the third of the little party went down to rise no more.

Terrified over these unerring shots, coming from some quarter unknown to them, the survivors beat another retreat, this time with wild haste, their cries ringing sharply on the night.

Before they had passed beyond gunshot, so rapidly did the Woodranger recharge his weapon, he had lifted the firearm to a horizontal position, and was glancing along its barrel.

"Be keerful, ol' Danger!" he whispered, "and ne'er let your temper outrun your jedgment. You

ne'er yet have trailed a foe that durst not look you in the e'en."

So the three were allowed to escape, and for more than three hours the Woodranger watched and waited for some movement on their part without discovering any indication of their actions. During all of the time he did not leave his post, nor for a moment cease to look for his enemies.

He had heard nothing of those in the Lookout, and he was beginning to think the night might pass without further evidence of attack from the Indians, when he discovered two canoes bearing down toward his post. The simultaneous appearance of these boats, and separated by a mile or more of distance, gave him cause for some misgivings as to the outcome of the renewal of hostilities.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WOODRANGER'S LAST STAND

"THE varmints that I let off so easy the first time have gone, like wolves hungry for the feast, to get other wolves to mingle with 'em in the amazement. Do you hear that, ol' Danger? Where there were six painted pagans, we shall have, mebbe, four times six."

With these words he again became silent, watching the advance of the two canoes, as they drew rapidly nearer. One was running so as to reach the shore below him; the other, unless it changed its course, would touch land at the foot of the path. The first soon passed out of his range of vision, and the Woodranger realized now by experience what he had foreseen. The Indians coming from that direction were sure to take him at a disadvantage.

It was not long before he distinguished an object following in the wake of the last canoe, which at first seemed possible to be another boat. But this idea quickly left him, and, as he became certain of the object, the old familiar smile stole over

his features, the lips moving with silent speech and the eyes glistening with new-found light. Finally his thought found expression in the following words:

"Aweel, it be an ol' amazement, and sometimes ol' tricks serve best. I do not previcate the truth when I say that they are determined to oust the ol' man this time. Now's me, what's worth doing at all is worth doing well. We won't sleep at our post, ol' Danger, will we?"

So silence again settled upon the little corner behind the rocks where the Woodranger coolly and calmly awaited his fate. The canoe steering to his right had not reappeared upon his view. The other was continuing to come nearer, but without undue haste. Owing to the darkness, for the sky had become overcast with clouds within the hour, the Woodranger was still unable to count the occupants of the canoe, though he was certain there were more than had appeared early in the night. That they were Indians he had no doubt.

Ffteen minutes later, for the boat had slackened its speed, he could count ten plumed heads. One reason of the slow advance was now apparent, explaining also his speech recently made.

The Indians were pulling behind them a small tree!

Their object in doing this would not have been

a mystery to even one not versed in border warfare much longer.

All at once, as if the water had swallowed them up, the entire party vanished!

Again the countenance of the forester was traversed by a smile, but there was the grimness of death rather than the light of mirth in its rapid transit across his sun-trod features.

If the dusky warriors had disappeared, the tree continued to sweep nearer the shore. Ay, it came faster than it had before, for it was now propelled by ten pairs of lusty arms!

Their plan was to gain the shore under its cover, and then to rush upon the concealed party before they could be checked.

Still their approach did not concern the Woodranger half as much as that of the party which he could not see. But of one thing he was certain: they could not gain a position to his rear unless they climbed to the top of the cliff, when they would be too far removed to be a source of danger to him, if a menace to the stone house, which was beyond doubt their object.

Could one man with a single-barrelled gun hope to hold them at bay?

The day was now breaking, and between the dawn and the day the Woodranger opened with a shot from his gun one of the most sanguinary fights

in which he was ever engaged. He had waited until he felt reasonably sure of his mark, and then he fired at a dark object half-hidden by a mass of pine foliage.

The success of his shot, proclaimed by the death-cry of one of the red men, was ample evidence that old Danger had not lost the cunning of that single eye.

The yell of the doomed Indian was answered by a series of wild shrieks from lower down the shore, and coming from the other party of Indians.

"Trails an' amazement crossed and crisscrossed with unknownness," mused the Woodranger, as he hastily recharged his firearm.

He realized now that the fight was fairly on, and that there would be no cessation for him until it was decided.

No outcries had come from those behind the floating tree, except that made by the savage who had fallen a victim to the unerring gun of the man they were determined to capture.

The pine was now moving in toward the shore with greater speed than at any time since its appearance, showing that the human power behind it was exerting itself to its utmost.

The Woodranger had again loaded his weapon, and stood waiting to pick off his next man.

The cries of the dusky rabble out of sight had

died down, and the forester was calculating on his chances to hit another of the Indians under the cover of the tree, when to his surprise the ringing report of a gun sounded over his head, quickly followed by the death-yell of another victim.

Scarcely had the report of the first shot ended before that of another rang above the tumult raised by the red men, and a second death-cry succeeded the first!

Both shots had been directed against the enemies out of the sight of the Woodranger.

While he knew they had not come from the stone house, he realized that they came from that direction, though it seemed to him from some position far up on the mountainside.

If wholly unexpected, the forester simply said:

"There's music for you, ol' Danger! You aren't alone in the amazement."

He didn't have time to say more. There was earnest work ahead for him. The party under the floating pine were now close into the shore, and he could hear the others coming more swiftly than cautiously upon the scene.

Selecting his second victim, he fired again, but believed he missed his man. A branch of the tree had swung around and thrown the bullet out of its course.

Without stopping to note the effect of his shot,

he began to reload once more. Before he had accomplished this task, the Indians sprang up from the water, and six or eight leaped into sight from below the corner of rock.

The lower end of the path was now filled with the yelling fiends, who made a wild rush up its narrow length. Fortunately, it was too narrow to admit of more than three coming abreast, and two of these were shot by the unseen marksman before the entire body had got fairly into the mad chase.

Before their yells had ended, the Woodranger sent the third upon his way to the "happy hunting-grounds," when the rest fled precipitately back toward the water, or down the rim of rock overhanging the shore.

The Woodranger had plenty of time to recharge his firearm this time, though he did not dally in his work. When this was accomplished, he patted the old gun affectionately, saying, while he resumed his watch over the scene:

"Well done, lad, well done. But, now's me, here we be claiming all the fortune o' war, when that lass up yonder, or some good friend, is placing two pellets o' lead where you and I are trailing only one! And so clumsy do we stumble along that ours warbles like a duck walking on one foot. The brown-faces are holding a talk. It will be better for 'em if they talk long."

The Indians seemed to take the advice of the Woodranger, even if it did not reach their ears, for their council lasted over half an hour. It was then growing light, and this attempt to reach the height was made with less determination than the first, and was successfully met by the forester and his unseen ally.

When the third of their number had fallen, the others beat another hasty retreat, and for a couple of hours they were careful to keep out of sight. But it was still an anxious period to the Woodranger, who did not dare to relax his vigilance for a moment. It was true he knew he had somewhere in the recesses of the rocks or among the trees above him a friend, but he had received no communication from such a person, and, if it had not been for the deadly shots sent down into the midst of his enemies by that same unknown ally, he would not have dreamed such a person had been there.

So hour after hour wore tediously away. The warm September sun climbed over the mountain-top and descended into the west, leaving long silver trails upon the surface of the Horican. Then these were succeeded by a train of shadows, lengthening and spreading until they covered the broad bosom of the lake, and night once more settled her sable pall upon the scene.

The Woodranger was aware all of the day that

at no time did all of his enemies leave the scene, while no less than four times did they rally and make ineffectual attempts to follow up the path. Each occasion, with the assistance of the unseen marksman, he had driven them back to the water, or down the shore. They had carried off their dead with them, but he knew nearly as many had fallen as had at first appeared upon the place. By this he knew also that reinforcements had replenished their numbers.

He had partaken sparingly of the little dried meat he carried in his wallet, but he had not tasted of a drop of water, and the thirst was becoming severe. The soft lapping of the lake against the rocks so near at hand came up to him in mockery of his sufferings. Ever and anon he looked up toward the stone house, but no sign of life was to be seen. This was a relief to him, however, rather than a hardship. Often he communed with himself, but no murmur or word of fear left his lips.

As calmly as at the beginning of his long and sleepless vigil he entered upon his second night, knowing that his enemies would make a more desperate effort than ever to rout him before another dawn. He had sighted in the distance two canoes loaded with warriors, and he felt certain a larger number than at any time awaited the fitting hour for renewed endeavours to gain the summit.

If the old scout was disappointed at the non-appearance of friends to succour him, he did not betray it by word or act. Rather he seemed to take it for granted that the fight was his, his and his unseen ally's, somewhere above his retreat — somewhere in the great pine towering a hundred feet into the air, as he had finally discovered. But the shots had seemed to come from the heart of the tree, far up in its lofty trunk.

With such feelings as may be imagined, but cannot be fully understood, he maintained his trying vigil, while the night crept on apace. He knew by the stars, whose dial was as plainly read by him as the hands upon a clock, that the midnight hour was passing. He felt, too, that the time for an attack from his enemies was at hand. Dark clouds moving sluggishly across the heavens, carrying threatenings of rain, would favour them in such work, if it were undertaken.

A splash in the lake a hundred yards out from the shore betrayed the presence of some sportive member of the finny tribe inhabiting its waters. Then the low, plaintive note of a catbird lower down the shore fell on the air with the relief that comes from a sound that breaks a silence which has grown tedious, if not wearisome. As if not to be outdone by this feathered wide-awake of the scene, a belated thrush sent forth its pipings uncommonly

shrill and loud. This was followed by the dull *tu-whit* of an owl, located somewhere, according to its call, close to the water's edge.

The last two cries brought a smile to the features of the Woodranger, and framed upon his lips were the murmured words:

"Mebbe the birds have lost their cunning, but sich is not common among the creatures o' night. Now I've minded it —"

The sharp howl of a distant wolf came down the mountainside as the forester spoke, but neither the cry of the wolf nor his speech found its completeness, for at that moment such a medley of yells and shrieks as only the North American Indians could utter drowned all other notes and cries, making the night-scene hideous with its fiendish noise.

The battle was on again, and there would be no turning back of its tide till the sea had run dry!

Knowing the deadly purpose of this attack, the Woodranger stood defiantly at bay, old Danger cocked and primed for the opening of the fight. Nor was the suspense long. As near as he could tell, a score of Huron warriors, with a sprinkling of Iroquois, swarmed into the narrow passage, and discharging a volley of bullets up the path, rushed furiously forward.

The Woodranger waited until certain of his victim, the foremost of his enemies, and then he fired.

This chief had barely fallen before a shot from the pine felled the companion beside him. Half a dozen shots were fired in retaliation by the Indians, while they dashed madly over the bodies of their dead comrades in their wild haste to reach the foe-man who was all the more to be dreaded because out of sight.

By this time the Woodranger had reloaded his weapon, and its deadly contents was quickly sent into their midst. While the yell of this warrior was yet ringing on the air above the exultant shouts of his companions and the hue and cry of the fight, a singular thing happened.

Some of the Indians, in their fierce determination to gain the summit, had scaled the rocky barrier on the right of the path, and so surely did they accomplish this purpose that they climbed over the rough wall, and were passing the range of the fatal firing of the Woodranger, when a huge boulder setting edgewise in their pathway was overturned by their movements. With a loud crash this fell upon the leaders of those climbing by the regular path.

A few of these were crushed by the stone, while their companions beat a precipitate retreat, giving expression to their fears by prolonged exclamations of terror.

In this manner the Woodranger was given an

unexpected respite, which he improved by reloading his gun.

The loosening and displacement of the big boulder left a clearer way for the more adventurous of the red men, and these now flung themselves headlong upon the besieged forester. He emptied the contents of his firearm into their midst, and then, having no further time to reload and finding the enemies pressing upon him so closely, he prepared for a final stand — a hand-to-hand combat, which he knew could not last long.

The Indians who had been temporarily discomfited by the falling rock now rallied to the assistance of their companions.

The firing from the pine had ceased, nor did it figure any more in the unequal contest, where one brave, unflinching spirit was pitted against a dozen or more of demons.

Boldly taking his stand at the side of the path, the hero of a hundred fights, believing this was to be his last, resolved to make his death as dear as possible to his enemies. One, two, three of them went to rise no more, but might is certain to conquer sometimes where even the most cunning arm cannot win. Trampling under feet the bodies of the slain, two brawny Hurons reached the side of the Woodranger with uplifted tomahawks. Another was tugging at his back, and among them the

forester fell, overpowered, but not conquered, for a brief while. And then the foremost reached, with an exultant yell, for that scalp-lock worth to him all the lives that had been lost in the bitter fight for it!

CHAPTER XVIII.

BEN AND THE SERGEANT

It will be remembered that at the close of Chapter XV., we left Ben Browne in the hottest of the fight near the shore of the Horican just as he had been felled by a blow on the head. He was not insensible long, for he was quickly brought back to consciousness by feeling the pressure of a hand upon his head and the steely touch of a knife.

He uttered a cry of horror as he realized that he was being scalped alive by the dusky foe bending over him, and he tried to spring to his feet.

The Iroquois, not to be cheated so easily of his coveted trophy, gave expression to a fierce exclamation, and flinging him back upon the earth, lifted his knife to deal a blow which should in reality end the opposition of his victim. Ben closed his eyes, never expecting to open them again upon the scenes of this life.

He then had a sort of hazy consciousness of hearing a voice in stern command ringing above the medley of confusing cries, and the next he knew he was lying several feet away quite alone.

In the brief interval he had caught sight of the handsome, striking countenance of a man in middle life, whom he thought must be a French officer. But as soon as this person had driven away the Indian who had attacked him, he sprang back to the conflict, leaving Ben to shift for himself.

To the young Ranger this seemed the wildest, most terrible scene he had ever witnessed. But even from his situation he could see that the enemy were getting the best of the British and Mohawks. The surprise had been so complete that the latter had been quickly bewildered, and the whole body recoiled with a confusion that completely changed its position. A rout instantly followed, and those who had been in the lead of the train were now in the rear!

Some of the New England troops rallied, and under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Whiting covered the retreat, contesting the pursuing French and Iroquois after the tactics of Indian warfare by firing from behind trees, and dodging from one tree to another as they were driven back.

General Johnson, hearing the firing at the camp, and anticipating something of what had happened, sent a relief force to the assistance of the others. These troops did good work, but the tide of battle had already turned beyond stemming, and they

could only join with those who were endeavouring to make as effective a retreat as was possible.

After a little while the firing grew more and more scattered and desultory, until it had practically ceased. Then Ben heard the blare of trumpets sounded by the French commander to recall his scattered forces.

Seeing his gun lying a few feet away, the young Ranger, weak and stiffened by his recent experiences, started toward it, thinking it was time for him to be getting away.

But he had only managed to get possession of his musket, when a voice near at hand ordered him to desist.

"I wouldn't let the red tear off your scalp-lock, but I am not going to let you run away, my fine fellow."

Ben recognized the same officer who had come so opportunely to his rescue a few minutes before, and realizing that he was completely in his power, he resolved to surrender as gracefully as possible.

"I am at your command, sir, seeing I can do no better than yield."

"See that he is securely bound, and taken to the rear," commanded the officer.

"Very well, Lieutenant Berne," replied one of the soldiers who was ordered to do this work. Five minutes later Ben was a prisoner, and removed

from the centre of the bitter hostilities. In fact, the furious fighting was over for awhile. The "bloody morning scout," as that unfortunate and deadly affair became known in New England story, was over. But its sequel was yet to follow, a fitting climax to the savage beginning.

General Johnson, seeing now his mistake in not fortifying his position upon the shore of the lake before, began to make such preparations for a defence as he could. Trees were felled from the near-by forest and dragged in; many of the bateaux which had been built for another purpose were made to help in constructing the barricade, and wagons did their part in this hasty line of protection.

Though working like beavers, the New England soldiers had barely raised this imperfect barricade before the white-coated enemy were seen marching down the road. Fortunately for them, Dieskau was unable to rally his dusky allies, who were ranging the woods and lake shore, shouting and firing like so many madmen let loose. Both the sagacious Hendrick and the subtle St. Pierre gone, the deluded and excited red men had no one to infuse order and system into their work, until Ben, who had been left on a slight elevation of land where he could witness the whole scene, saw Lieutenant Berne dash forward where they were skulk-

ing and acting the worst. His presence, not less than his stern fiery words of command, acted like magic upon them.

The Iroquois and Hurons again brought under control, and Lieutenant Berne now their leader, Dieskau began his attack, and for four long, terrible hours the battle raged. It was, as one of its participants said, "the most awful day my eyes ever beheld. There seemed to be nothing but thunder and lightning and perpetual pillars of smoke." Time and again Ben closed his eyes to shut out the terrible sight, and then he would tug at his bonds in the hope he might get free to join in the bloody fray.

There was no disputing any man's heroism that day, for French and English, and better yet the sturdy New Englander, one and all fought with sheer desperation. A Mohawk warrior within the English fortifications, having shivered his own fire-arm, seeing a Canadian on the enemy's side of the barricade with a gun, leaped the breastworks, and, killing the other with a single blow from his tomahawk, seized his gun and powder-horn and regained the inside of the defence in safety. To the shame of his comrades, few imitated his example, while the Indians under Lieutenant Berne rallied in fitful attacks, only to retreat to the cover of the growth.

General Johnson had three cannons, which more

than all else carried terror to the Indians. With all his vaunted bravery, the red man could never overcome his fear for the thunder of the white man's gun. Thus the cannon was an object of especial dread to him.

Finally Dieskau, who fought valiantly throughout the struggle, was shot in the leg. Unable to keep about longer, he was having his wounded limb dressed by his adjutant, when he received a second and more severe wound in the hip.

Seeing his soldiers beginning to fall back, and realizing that the crucial moment was at hand, he said to his impromptu surgeon:

"Leave me, Montreuil, and rally the regulars for a final charge against the British camp. We must carry their works, but we must do it without these cowardly Canadians and useless red men."

Adjutant Montreuil tried to retrieve a battle already lost. The New England men were even then scaling the hasty breastworks they had constructed, and hurling themselves upon the French and their allies. The latter broke and fled in wild disorder, leaving their disabled commander sitting under the tree, a helpless witness of his defeat.

While this was taking place, Ben Browne was surprised by a sniff a short distance away. There was something familiar in the sound, and turning

his surprise changed to joy, when he beheld the Sergeant.

"Noble old fellow!" exclaimed the young Ranger, "how I would pat you if my hands were free. Say, Sergeant, can't you free them for me?"

The dog heard and understood so far that he at once began to bite and gnaw at the deerskin thongs. With his sharp teeth it was but the work of a moment for him to rend the ligatures, and Ben, to his great joy, found himself free.

It was now nearly night, and without loss of time, Ben started on a run to what he considered a quarter of greater safety. At first he had thought of going to the camp, but remembering that his gun had been left a short distance away near where he had been captured, he went in that direction, hoping to find it, Sergeant keeping him company.

The dog seemed as glad to see him as an old friend could be, and kept jumping up beside him, licking his hands, and giving expression to his joy in low, soft barks.

The firing of the men on both sides had become more irregular, and Ben judged the fight was practically over. He felt confident the New England men had won, or at least repulsed and driven back the allied enemies.

"Good Sergeant, where have you been? How did you come out with those Indians in the canoe?"

If Ben expected a reply there was no time given for it. He had not fairly finished his question before the Sergeant suddenly leaped into the air, sniffed vigorously for a moment, and then darted away into the depths of the forest at a swift pace.

At a loss what to make of this conduct on the part of Sergeant, who was not given to such actions without good cause, Ben resolved to follow him as closely as possible. This he did, though not without many misgivings.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SCOUTS OF THE HORICAN

RUSHING through the forest with more haste than caution, it was a wonder, as Ben recalled his actions afterward, that he was not discovered by the Indians or Canadians and killed. The best solution to the thought was that those of them who had not previously escaped were as anxious as he to leave the vicinity.

He had gone about a hundred rods when he became aware of the fact that he was approaching a body of men coming through the growth, and he had so nearly stumbled upon them that the next moment he heard the low, but stern, command to halt. It is needless to say that he did this as quickly as he could, and though he trembled lest he had fallen into the hands of enemies, he thought there was a familiar ring to the voice. Throwing up his hands, to show that he meditated no hostility, he waited anxiously for the next move on the part of his unseen challenger.

"Who are you?" demanded the same voice.

Recognizing it this time beyond doubt, he exclaimed, joyously:

"A friend, Captain Folsom."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed another voice near at hand, "it is Ben Browne, who was reported as killed."

Ben was soon made aware of the fact that he had run upon a scouting party from Fort Lyman on its way to the assistance of General Johnson. It seemed that William Stark had succeeded in reaching the fort, and upon his alarm preparations were made to sally forth to the scene of the fight. He was with the party, which numbered about three hundred, and at this time he and Sergeant were enjoying a reunion that showed how sincerely the couple loved each other. The Ranger had clasped his four-footed friend in his arms, and was hugging and patting him, while he talked as he would have talked to a child.

"Seen some hard times, have you, Sergeant? Well, we won't be separated again, old boy; no — no! Glad to see your old master? Tut — tut! get down, lad, there is work for us to do."

Scouts sent out to reconnoitre had now returned, announcing that a body of Indians were resting a little ways ahead, and near a pool of water close by the road. They were believed to greatly outnumber the Rangers, but little did the latter care

for that. It was of more importance to them that they surprised the others in their fancied security. So, without longer delay, the entire party moved stealthily down through the forest to the rendezvous of the unsuspecting Indians.

Never was surprise more complete. The red men did not dream of the presence of an enemy creeping upon them, until the word was passed along the irregular line of Rangers:

"Fire!"

Oh! what noise and confusion, what hurrying and skurrying there was then! The Indians undertook to return the open volley, but they fired at random. There was no one at first to lead them, and a body of men without a leader is helpless. With the Iroquois and Hurons were a body of Canadian militia, who did better, rallying twice to try and beat back the foe. Captain McGinnis, one of the leaders of the Rangers, was mortally wounded, though he pluckily kept up, giving order after order until the enemies were routed. He was then taken to the camp, where he died soon after reaching the place.

Ben and Lieutenant Stark, with Sergeant, were on the extreme right, and were doing good work, when a French officer, trying to rally the Indians, was seen to stagger and fall to the earth. A moment later his discomfited followers broke and fled in

disorder, some of them passing over him in their flight.

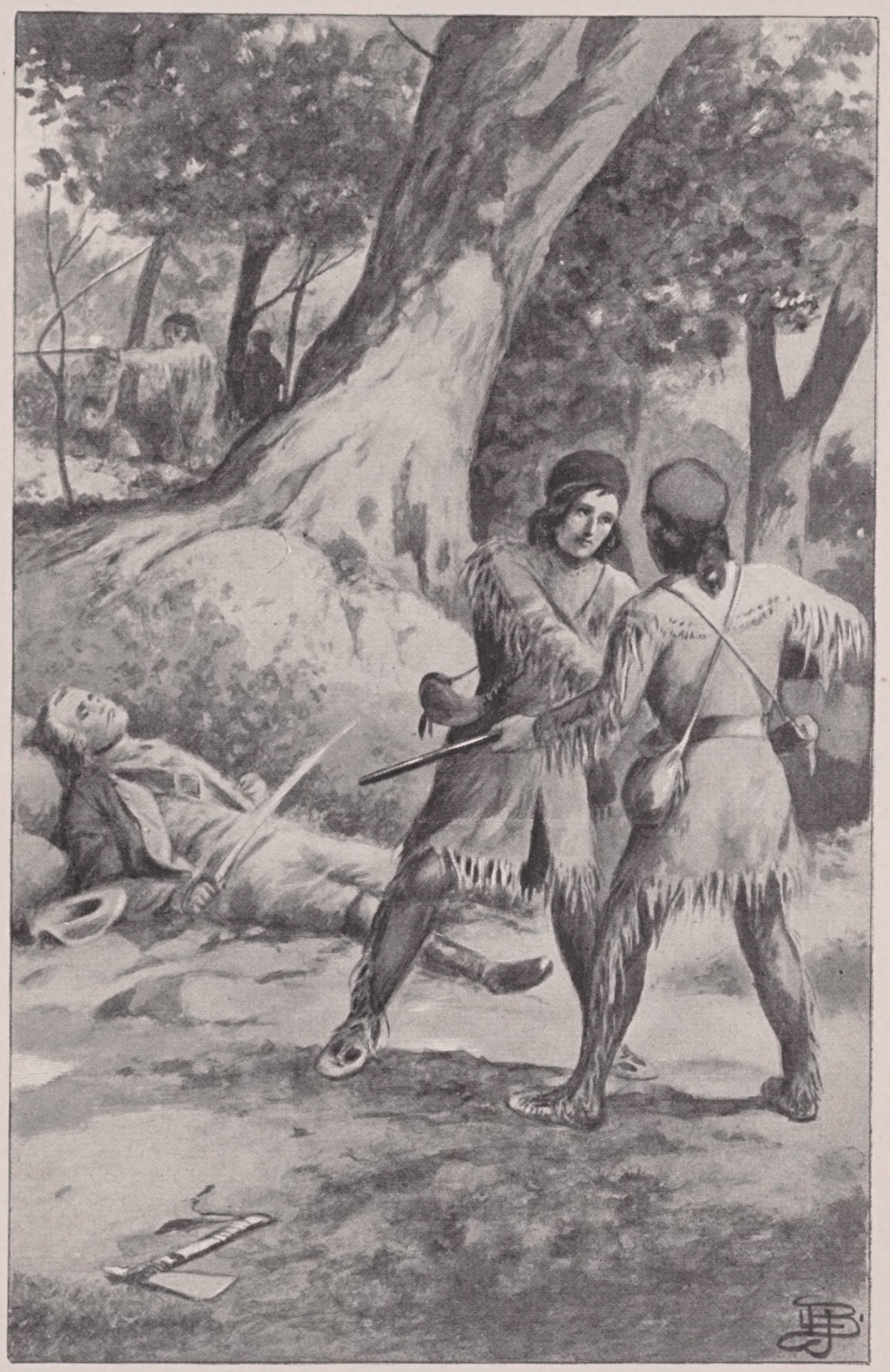
Upon reaching the place, and seeing that the man was alive, one of the Rangers was about to fire pointblank at his breast, when Ben saw and recognized the officer.

It was Lieutenant Berne!

Remembering the favour the Frenchman had done for him that day, Ben sprang forward and, pushing aside the weapon of his companion, stood over the fallen man, crying sharply:

"Spare him! He is my friend."

Ben knew he was taking some chances in doing this, but he had the satisfaction of seeing the Ranger pass on without offering further molestation. The Canadians and Indians were now scattered through the forest, and the fighting seemed to be over. In truth it was, and a sorry sight was displayed upon the field where the rivals had fought. While the Rangers had not suffered the loss of many lives, the allied forces had not escaped so easily, and to this day the little pool of water upon whose banks the battle, the third of that day, took place, is known by the gruesome name of "Bloody Pond." The fugitives managed to get together in small parties in the early part of the evening, and they camped that night in the woods. The following day they succeeded in reaching their canoes,



"'SPARE HIM! HE IS MY FRIEND.'"

when they silently and sadly retraced their course toward Fort Carillon. The battle of Lake George, as it became known, was certainly a hopeless beginning for the French invasion.

Ben found Lieutenant Berne wounded, but not severely. The French officer recognized the young Ranger, and his first words were:

"Haye the French been routed?"

"Yes, sir. That is, they have been routed here, and I judge the battle has gone against them everywhere."

"I am glad of it!" exclaimed the officer, somewhat to the surprise of Ben. Then he added: "I suppose that sounds strange to you, but I have no love for them, and was serving them under compulsion. I suppose I must consider myself a prisoner of war?"

"Captain Folsom is in command here, sir, and it will be as he says. But you need not fear any but fair treatment."

"Thank you. If I must submit to the inevitable, I will do so with as good a grace as possible. But the delay it will incur will be very disagreeable and inconvenient to me. I had not looked for it. Are you a stranger in this vicinity?"

"I am, Lieutenant Berne. I belong to a regiment of troops stationed at Fort Lyman."

"I see."

At that moment the commander of the troops, accompanied by William Stark, came along and Lieutenant Berne was ordered to be taken to General Johnson's camp. From that time Ben saw no more of the genial Frenchman, whom he had grown in that short time to like.

The Rangers, who had become considerably scattered during the fight, as was usually the case in bush-fighting, soon began to collect, and while all felt very sad over the fate of Captain McGinnis and many of their comrades, all felt like rejoicing. The rout at Bloody Pond had seemed a fitting completion of the fight upon the shore of the lake, and General Johnson had good reason to give them a large meed of the praise for the victory. Yet, as was generally the result, he secured most of the glory for himself, and was created a baronet for a victory over which personally he had little credit in winning.

Baron Dieskau was taken to New York, and thence to England, finally recovering from his wounds. The French could not feel otherwise than disappointed over the result, though they went on fortifying at Carillon and elsewhere with redoubled energy, still confident of achieving ultimate success.

Later Ben learned that Lieutenant Berne was also sent to England as a prisoner of war. But he quite forgot the French officer at the time, in his

anxiety to return to Lookout Point to the assistance of the Woodranger and the others besieged at the stone house.

As soon as the Rangers had somewhat recovered from the excitement of the conflict he sought out Captain Rogers to explain the situation. The Ranger chief listened with interest.

"The Woodranger must be rescued at once, and I will detail a squad under Lieutenant Stark to start as soon as possible. Of course you will go?"

"I wish to. I am afraid, from my experiences coming across the lake, the old man is having a tight time of it."

"I'll risk him," replied Rogers. "At least I never saw the Woodranger in a place yet he couldn't get out of, and I have tramped with him as boy and man twenty odd years."

"Still I am afraid he will not be able to hold out in a siege until we can get there."

So Ben chafed at the delay in getting started, though the start was made as speedily as could be. The men needed a little rest after their recent hot work, but while they were sleeping others obtained a bateau to convey the party across the pond, and at last the impatient Ben, who had been through enough during the last twenty-four hours to have exhausted a less strong frame, gladly saw the boat

pushed off from the shore, and the passage of the Horican begun.

"What if we are too late?" asked Ben, while he and Lieutenant Stark looked anxiously ahead over the water, and recalling his experiences the previous night.

"We started as soon as we could," replied Stark.

"Very true, but I was a long time in carrying the news."

"According to what I hear, it might have been much longer," replied the other. "What is it, Sergeant — a redskin? I had rather have that dog for a companion on an expedition like this than any man I ever knew, and I'll not except the Woodranger. He will scent a red a mile away. See! He has lain down again; as long as he is quiet you may feel safe."

CHAPTER XX.

INDIAN PLUME'S VIGIL

WHILE the scenes described in the preceding chapters were taking place there were others who were performing an anxious part, and awaiting with intense interest the result. These were the three persons in the stone house, situated only a short distance from the Woodranger, and yet separated from him.

After the departure of Ben Browne, Indian Plume, requesting Mrs. Briant and Alex to sleep while they might, took her position at one of the windows, where she could command a wide view of the lake. She saw the young Ranger leave the shore, and his canoe was visible to her for some time after it had passed beyond the sight of the forester on the rocky rim skirting the water.

"He is a brave young man," she said to herself, "but he is going into deadly danger. How I dread this war! If father were only here I should not be so timid. I wonder where he is to-night! Shall I ever see him again?"

Finally she turned for a few moments to gaze

upon the twain who had come so strangely under her care. The woman, worn out with her recent hardships, was sleeping very peacefully. But Alex was tossing on his couch unable to rest. She crossed the floor, and sitting upon a stool she drew up for that purpose, she placed her hand on his feverish brow.

The touch of her hand instantly revived him, and he opened his eyes with a look of pleasure. Startled at what she had done she moved away from him.

"Please put your hand back there," he said, softly. "It is so cool, and my head feels so hot. I cannot close my eyes without again seeing that scene on the water when mother and I were attacked and captured. Is she asleep?"

"Yes. You will do well to sleep while you can. There may be reason by and by for you to be awake."

"I cannot sleep, Indian Plume. Has that young man gone?"

"Yes. I have just watched him out of sight. I fear he will run into trouble."

"Has the old man gone?"

"He is at the foot of the cliff, where he is keeping watch for us. What a strange man! He made me promise not to come down where he is as long as he is there. I promised for three days."

"What is his name?"

"The young man called him Taconica, or some such a name. That is Indian for tree. I think he is very nice."

"And I think you are very nice to be so kind to mother and me. What a lot of trouble we are making you."

"Not to be mentioned. I was so lonely here it seems nice to have some one to talk to."

"How long have you lived here alone?"

"It has been nearly two years since father went away. He promised to come back in a short time. Is two years a short time as my brother counts the months?"

"It would seem long to watch and wait. I hope he will come soon. If he does not you must go with us. We have lost our home, I know, but we will soon build another."

Alex watched her closely to note the effect of his words, wishing to speak more plainly, but knowing it would not be good taste for him to do so. Not now; not then! He reached out to clasp her hand, but she had already risen to her feet, and looking toward the door, she said:

"If my brother will remain here alone with his mother a few minutes, Indian Plume will climb to the Lookout, where she has wanted to go for some

time. She can see a long way, and no foe can come near without being seen by her."

"She can go," replied Alex, though not comprehending the meaning of her words; "but the time will seem long while Indian Plume is gone."

Without replying to this she went to one side of the apartment, and pulling aside a bearskin hung against the wall disclosed a dark opening where the wall had been built against the side of the big pine which rose over the top of the house. In a moment she disappeared into the tree.

Alex watched her departure, and as the folds of the bearskin covered again the aperture, he could not refrain from giving expression to an exclamation of wonder. His utterance awakened his mother, who asked, in a tone of anxiety:

"Did you speak to me, my son?"

"No, mother! I merely 'thought aloud,' as the Woodranger used to say. I hope you are feeling better."

"Very much, Alex. My wound does not pain me much now. I think I have been sleeping quite awhile. I had such strange dreams, all jumbled together, persons and places. Where is that girl who came here with us?"

Alex explained her mysterious disappearance, when mother and son fell to watching and waiting for her.

Meanwhile Indian Plume stood within the open space in the heart of the big pine, which was hollow from its roots to a height of more than fifty feet. Immediately she began to ascend the side of the strange room by means of steps which had been ingeniously cut for that purpose. At a distance of about twenty feet she gained a small platform built against the wall. At this place openings had been cut through the outer wall. These were small at the outside rim, but they had been cut away on the inside so as to allow the person looking out a wide view of the scene. The steps continued on higher above this resting-place, but Indian Plume did not seek to climb to their top at this time.

Applying her eye to one of the loopholes, she gazed long and earnestly out upon the surrounding landscape. From this position she could look down plainly upon the Woodranger, as he rested watchfully at his post. She also commanded a good view of the shore, while she could look far out over the water, across the lake if it had been daytime.

"How quiet it is!" she murmured. "Father used to say such stillness was unnatural and boded evil of some kind." Then her mind going back to other days, she said: "What happy days those were! But they are gone for ever, and I do not know what will become of poor me. How selfish

I am when there are so many others suffering, too. I must not forget that sweet-faced woman with me now, and that young man. He seems so nice. I wonder if there is as much trouble everywhere in the world as there is here by the beautiful Horican. It seems as if there never was a bright day for those who have lived within sight and sound of its shores. How many times have I listened to the stories of battle and cruel warfare waged against the race over which my mother was a queen. Where are they now? Gone! as the leaves of last year's forest have flown, are they gone. And I, whom father delighted to crown when I was a child as the Princess of the Horican, am the last in whose veins flows the blood of the race. But I must not give way to my loneliness. Father said there was nothing so wrong. He did not forget to smile. Is that a canoe upon the water?"

The question was the natural outburst of thought at the sudden discovery of what looked at first like a speck upon the starlighted Horican, but which grew rapidly in size and clearness. In a few minutes the fair watcher was satisfied that it was a canoe carrying half a dozen Indians.

This was indeed the party the Woodranger even then was watching, and which made the first attack upon him.

Anxious to know what the appearance of this

body of warriors meant, Indian Plume left her post only that she might disclose to Alex Briant her discovery. Confident that they were intending an attack upon the Lookout, she prepared to make such a defence as she could. She found upon investigation that she had only a small allowance of powder. She had two firearms, one a weapon of French make, lighter than those carried by the English and New England men, and the other a heavier gun her father had obtained from a trader in Montreal, but which had come from the shop of one Seth Pomeroy, a noted gunmaker of those days. This was an excellent piece, and with these two weapons she resolved to lend such assistance as she could to the lone scout stationed on the shore.

How well she did this has been told, but the anxiety and painful suspense of that night and the following day cannot be described without taking too much space. The most anxious one of the three in the stone house was Mrs. Briant, while Alex could not help chafing at his inability to lend his aid during that time when it was needed so much. Indian Plume assured both that the white man at the foot of the cliff was quite able to take care of all that had come to offer molestation, disclaiming any credit for what she was doing.

During the day, while there were no signs of an

enemy near, Alex urged her to confer with the Woodranger, but resolved to keep her promise to a letter, nothing that he could say or do could cause her to do differently. She had a small quantity of provision, and water from a spring in the side of the mountain had been made to flow into the building, so in the matter of provision they had no reason to be fearful. In that respect at least they were better off than the Woodranger.

Indian Plume saw that the wound of Mrs. Briant received such attention as it needed, while she made her as comfortable as possible.

But of keener and deeper significance than all this was the sight the brave maid witnessed from the upper lookout in the old pine. This was nothing less than a bird's-eye view of the battle raging upon the distant shore of the Horican. The thunder of the guns and the clouds of smoke told her that a desperate fight was going on — a fight which she felt was to decide in a large measure their own fates.

She saw the sun sink out of sight in the west, behind pillars of ashen smoke, and night once more settle gloomily upon the scene. Ignorant of the result of the battle, and weary from her long and lonely vigil, the Princess of the Horican slowly descended to her companions in the stone house.

She found these anxiously awaiting her com-

ing, and they listened with deep interest to her story.

"Do you think the Indians will come to-night, Indian Plume?" asked Alex, as she sat near him and his mother at the close of her account.

"That is more than I can tell. We can only pray that they will not come. I have only two rounds of powder left, a charge for each of the guns."

"Have you seen anything of the old scout?"

"Yes; he has stood on watch all day. I am sure he has not closed his eyes in sleep since he took up his post there."

"Neither have you for all that time," said Alex. "You are tired. Please lie down and sleep awhile, if it is only for an hour. I can watch. If my couch was only nearer that window."

"Perhaps I will sleep an hour, Mr. Briant, if you will promise to speak to me then."

"If you think I must. I don't see why the old man has not been up here to see us to-day."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RESCUE

INDIAN PLUME awoke very much refreshed after an hour's peaceful sleep. She hastened at once to the lookout, but discovered no signs of an enemy. The Woodranger was still at his post, as alert as ever, and while she watched him for a moment she murmured:

"A strange man. To-morrow I shall see him."

She returned to her friends with the welcome tidings that nothing of a suspicious nature was to be seen, and the little group fondly hoped they would not be troubled by the appearance of the Indians again.

With frequent visits by Indian Plume to her lookout, and snatches of conversation among themselves, the three passed the hours leading on toward midnight. The maid of the Horican was now constantly at her post, so she saw the canoes of the enemies before the Woodranger, and her hopes fell. Hastening below to convey the unpleasant news to her companions, she exclaimed:

"I fear we are lost! They come many more

this time, and I know more determined to kill us than before."

"I must be astir," said Alex, starting up, only to fall back upon his couch overcome by his exertions.

"Not that!" cried Indian Plume. "You must keep quiet. I was foolish to speak so. I was weak, like a woman. They cannot get us here. I feel very sure. The old man is a good fighter, and he will never let them pass him."

"But you said you had only two charges of powder, and you must remember it was your shots that helped him before."

"When my powder is gone, if there is need of it, I shall go down and help him fight them back."

Her dark eyes flashed, and her every action showed that she was terribly in earnest.

"You must not!" cried Alex. "Think of the danger. No — no! let the old scout stand his ground as long as he can. If they reach here, we will fight them hand-to-hand. I will help, if I have to do it on my hands and knees."

She made no reply, but the look upon her features told that she had decided upon her course of action, and nothing that might be said could turn her from it. Swiftly she mounted the steps to the lookout, and upon gaining the loophole found that the enemies were rapidly drawing near

to the shore. She saw also that the forester was preparing for the fight that was inevitable. What followed has been described. Indian Plume fired the two shots in her weapons, and realized she had done all she could there. She saw the onset made by the enemies, and saw the brave man who was so nobly defending her and the others fall. She could not stop to witness more, and catching up one of her empty guns, she was about to start to the scene of the contest, when she made a discovery which sent a thrill of hope to her heart. During the exciting action in the pathway, another boat had appeared upon the lake, and now was drawing close to the shore.

Indian Plume saw that this was a bateau carrying six or eight men, whom she quickly decided were whites coming to the rescue. With a cry of joy she rushed below, saying to Alex as she reached the room:

"Good news! Friends are coming to our rescue."

Without waiting for him to reply, with the realization of the Woodranger's peril in her mind, and regardless of what the consequence might be to her, she flung open the door and sped to the scene of deadly combat.

The bateau Indian Plume had discovered coming with such haste toward the shore was indeed

that containing the little party of Rangers under William Stark, who at that moment sat in the prow of the boat looking anxiously ahead to learn if possible the result of the fight he knew was being waged on the rocky point where the path started to the Lookout. With him, of course, were Ben, Philip, the friendly Sokokis, and Sergeant, who crouched beside his master during the anxious journey across the lake. Besides these there were four comrades.

"Row faster, boys!" cried Stark, excitedly. "I am afraid the old Woodranger will not be able to hold out until we get there."

The Sergeant sniffed the air, as if he was of the same opinion, and he rose upon his feet. Reading his thoughts, for the brave dog must have done some deep thinking during that momentous period, his master said:

"You can go if you want to, old fellow."

With a low murmur of gladness Sergeant quickly lifted himself clear of the boat, and the next moment was swimming swiftly through the water, moving faster than the clumsy boat in spite of the efforts of the men at the oars.

Stark watched the brave swimmer for a moment, and then he turned his gaze back to the scene dimly exhibited in the uncertain light of the stars, where one man was pitted against many in that unequal

fight for life. They were now near to the shore, and just at that moment Indian Plume stepped from the stone house upon her anxious descent to the assistance of the forester.

Quicker than any human person in that exciting moment was the gallant Sergeant. His feet touched the rocky beach as the brave maid opened the door, and without stopping to shake his sides of the dripping water, he bounded up the path at tremendous leaps, with a yelp of defiance and encouragement to him whom he was trying to save. The Indians — those in his pathway — were dashed aside as if they were so many toys set up for the sport of schoolboys. Speeding past and over them, he reached the side of the Woodranger just as the brawny Iroquois was about to lift his scalp. He never knew what struck him, what power hurled him upon the rock a quivering frame of humanity in the dusky skin of a barbarian. But the spark of life quickly fled, while the dog scattered his companions as a fierce gust of wind might toss a handful of leaves.

As the poor, terrified red men fled in wild confusion, some down the pathway, evidently thinking some invincible creature had suddenly sprung into their midst, they were met by a volley of shot from Stark and his companions. A few escaped

by leaping into the water, but the most of them fell before the unerring fire of the Rangers.

The following minute the bateau touched upon the rocky bottom of the lake, and its occupants sprang out upon the shore, Stark leading the way in a headlong run up the path.

They reached the central scene in this exciting performance simultaneously with Indian Plume, who paused somewhat alarmed at their appearance, but more from that of the Sergeant, who stood fiercely at bay beside the motionless form of the fallen Woodranger.

"Well done, Sergeant!" called out Stark, springing forward to see if the forester was dead, as he feared. The dog retreated slightly before his master, but stoutly held his position against any further encroachment.

Ben Browne had followed next to Stark in the dash up the pathway, and seeing the fair young Crusoe of the Horican looking excitedly over the scene, he said:

"I was a long time in coming back, Indian Plume, but I came as soon as I could get here."

"I understand," she replied. "I hope you have come in season to save him," pointing to the Woodranger.

Stark was already advancing to see if the forester was living or not, but before he could reach his

side he was very forcibly answered, for the other rose slowly to his feet, saying:

"Aweel, now's me! I count that an amazement that ties two knots in the string o' fate. It was a clus call, lads, a clus call for the ol' man, and your coming was a coming after my own heart. Yet I'm minded if it hadn't been for the dog this ol' head would be without its saving grace, as bald as an eagle's. I hol' that as a favour for the dog."

"Sergeant never fails to be on hand, Woodranger," said Stark, "and we rejoice no less than you that he was in season. You have had a tough fight?"

"A bit o' an amazement, lad. I opine the brownfaces feel the worst about it."

"By the crown of King George, Woodranger! it does look as if you had given old Danger a hearty dinner. Has any one been hurt?"

"Ask the lass there, William. I have been too tremendous busy to ask myself."

Indian Plume quickly apprised Stark and his companions of the situation at the Lookout, when the former said:

"It seems we came none too soon. It must have been a sorry time. But that is over now. We have come to take you all to Albany, as it will not do for you to stay here any longer. In Albany

you will be comparatively safe until this war is over."

"You had better move Mr. Briant and his mother there," said Indian Plume. "As for myself, I prefer to remain at my home."

"That will not do," replied Stark, in his energetic manner. "It will be unsafe for you to stay here longer. Why, the lake is alive with French and Indians, and they say more are coming. When the war is over you can come back if you wish, but as commander here for the present, I shall insist that you go to Albany. Come, boys," speaking to Ben and a couple of the others, "let's go up to the house."

There did not seem to be an opportunity for the maid of the Horican who had lived a Crusoe life here so long to refuse this impetuous Ranger. So she was fain to lead the way to the top of the plateau, followed by the others. Upon seeing that the Woodranger was not inclined to accompany them, Lieutenant Stark asked him to do so.

"Nay, lad, these ol' feet be too earth-tied to climb yon path. Go, you have the fire o' youth, and the ol' man will stay with the watch here. I ne'er dissemble the truth when I say that more'n eight and forty hours without sleep has laid heavy hands on these ol' eyes and 'numbed limbs none too sprightly at their best."

"Forgive me, Woodranger!" exclaimed Stark, "I had forgotten that. Rest while you may. There are blankets in the bateau; help yourself. You will find food, too. Eat and rest, while we prepare the others for the journey across the lake."

The forester made no reply to this invitation, but stood leaning heavily on the upturned muzzle of his firearm, looking after the retreating forms of those climbing the path. Finally he said, communing with himself:

"Three times did he trail that name, and I do not previcate the truth. And *they* are coming down here! By and by it may be — not now! There is yet a tremble in the heart and fog in the een, which forbids the ol' man from taking that trail. Let him sleep upon the idee. There is a saving grace in sleep, and then — Mebbe I'll perambulate a leetle way by myself. You may call it a whim; ay, an ol' man's whim — a whimmer's whim — but I must talk these thoughts with myself — alone with natur'."

Then the Woodranger, with a long, lingering, anxious look in the direction of the height where she and her son were at that moment thinking of him, his lips moving in silent prayer, walked slowly, wearily down the slanting pathway to the water's edge. A canoe danced lightly upon the placid Horican, which he loosened from its fastenings,

and springing in with a nimbleness quite at odds with his recent sluggish steps, he took up the paddle, to send the light craft swiftly from the land. It was but a speck upon the water when Stark returned to ask his advice about getting the fugitives down to the bateau.

"It is like him," he said, when the Rangers, who had witnessed this singular departure of the forester, apprised him of the fact. "Well, boys, it would be useless for us to lose any time in looking after him. We shall see him again in due time, mark my words. Now we must bring those people down here to the bateau."

Many hands make light work, and half an hour later both Mrs. Briant and Alex had been removed to the bateau, where they were made as comfortable as possible.

Indian Plume had been finally induced to accompany them to Albany, and without further loss of time, having seen that the stone dwelling was made as secure as possible, the entire party started on their journey to Albany, which they were destined to reach safely.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BUGLE NOTE

A CESSATION of hostilities followed the battle of Lake George, during which the enemies sought to reinforce their numbers, and prepare for more earnest work. General Johnson, having learned a lesson by his previous experiences, erected a fort at the head of Lake George, which he named after one of the princes of the reigning family of England, "William Henry." The walls of this fortification were made of timber, filled in with earth, and with a ditch surrounding it. It was square, with four bastions, and was considered capable of resisting a heavy cannonade.

Rogers and his Rangers were stationed here, and frequently sent out upon scouts into the vicinity of the enemy's strongholds, Ticonderoga and Crown Point. They usually followed the shore of the Horican or crossed its clear waters in canoes or bateaux. In winter these trips were made upon snowshoes, when they sallied forth with their rations upon their backs, and their firearms in the hands.

The Rangers were not organized to fight pitched battles, but for scouting and fighting bush-battles,

which were often sharp and exciting. Their real purpose was to scour the woods, find out the situation and numbers of the enemy, and clear the way for the British Regulars, who were little used to this mode of warfare, and ill-fitted for it. It was their purpose, too, to see that these soldiers were not taken by surprise at the hands of an enemy noted for their cunning and peculiar ways of fighting. The preliminaries attended to, the Rangers joined in the battle, often appearing at most opportune times, and changing the entire situation.

If their object seemed so simple, their organization was made with great elaboration and systematic thoroughness, for their leading spirit, Captain Rogers, was in his line of training one of the best disciplinarians of border warfare, and his drill was rigid and his discipline of the sternest sort.

Upon their marches, many of which were long and made through the country of an artful enemy, the Rangers moved in Indian file, and at such distances from each other as to avoid the danger of one bullet harming more than one man. A leader took charge of those in front, while another guarded the rear of each column.

Camp was never pitched until after dark, and then only when the surrounding country had been thoroughly reconnoitred, and a position selected which would enable them to command a view on

every side. The scouts sent out to reconnoitre were instructed never to return by the path taken in going out. The failure of a couple of scouts to do this in one of their campaigns led to one of the few defeats suffered by the indomitable Rogers.

The devices and stratagems employed by these hardy partisans were many and often elaborate, but always skilfully managed and cunningly planned. If brought face to face with the enemy, upon receiving the fire of their foes they dropped flat to the earth, rising the moment the shots had died away, to pour a deadly charge upon them. Few shots were ever wasted. Their more common method of fighting, however, was to advance from tree to tree, now crawling prone upon the earth, anon dodging from cover to cover, resorting to innumerable ruses to outwit an enemy in whose school of warfare they had proved more apt than even their teachers.

The typical Ranger, of which Rogers was the fitting chief, and William Stark and Ben Browne good examples, was a person of hardy constitution, inured to the privations and vicissitudes of forest life. He was able to make long marches upon scanty rations, sleep rolled in his blanket upon a pile of boughs, with only the night sky for his shelter. He knew the trails of the Indians as well as their ordinary haunts, and was seldom, if ever, at fault in

his judgment concerning the wiles and artifices of his dusky foemen.

His garb consisted of coarse small-clothes and leggins upon the lower limbs, with a close-fitting jacket about his body, a warm cap upon his head, and pair of stout moccasins upon his feet. In his belt he carried a short-handled hatchet, and a good-sized hunting-knife, while he held in his hands or slung over his shoulder a heavy, trusty musket of the make of that day. A large powder-horn hung by his side, while upon his back was buckled a blanket and knapsack stuffed with a supply of coarse bread and raw salt pork.

While it would be interesting to follow day by day the fortunes of our characters through the trying scenes that succeeded, it will not be necessary in order to gain the results arising from those adventures which affected them more closely in their after-life. As has been remarked, Mrs. Briant, Alex, and Indian Plume were conveyed in safety to Albany, though it was a long and painful journey to at least two of them, the mother and son. The Princess of the Horican, too, cast many an anxious, pathetic look back toward that home which she had enjoyed, if in loneliness, so long. To her there was a deeper significance in thus going hastily away than her companions could realize. There was also a singular missing of an opportunity, such

as often comes into our lives, and which was recalled afterward with regrets. But it was beyond their knowledge at the time, and was made in happy ignorance of the real situation.

At this period of the contention war had not been officially declared — save the mark! — but it was soon afterward, and the strife waxed fiercer and more hopeless for the English. Mrs. Briant and Indian Plume were only too glad to remain at Albany, where they could keep posted concerning the situation, but were in comparative safety. Alex's wound healing, before the new year he joined the fortunes of Rogers' Rangers, soon becoming one of the most efficient in the hazardous part they were acting.

Many of the adventures of those trying months lengthened into years are told in a Journal kept by Captain, afterward Major, Rogers himself. During the following year over a dozen perilous scouts were made into the enemy's vicinity, captives secured and valuable information taken back to the English commander. Ben and Alex were with many of these, meeting with some hairbreadth escapes and thrilling experiences. William Stark had now become the leader of a company, and was known as Lieutenant Stark.

But the years 1756 and 1757 brought results that were humiliating to the English forces, mainly on

account of incompetent leaders, frequent changes in these, and a lack of united action on the part of the New England colonies.

In the midst of this came the siege and massacre of Fort William Henry, a dark stain upon French success. The Marquis de Montcalm, a brave and efficient officer, afterward associated with the downfall of Quebec before the siege of General Wolfe, was in command of the French forces. Colonel Munro, a brave and gallant Scotchman, was in charge of the ill-fated fort at the time, but it was through no fault of his that it met with disaster. He acted a heroic part, but succour was not sent him, and the crushed old soldier was obliged to submit to the inevitable.

As none of our friends figured to any great extent in the unhappy affair, it is not necessary to try and depict any of its horrors here. The men from New England, who did not fall victims to their rapacious enemies, underwent an experience they remembered the balance of their lives.

Early in 1758, General Abercrombie having succeeded to the command of the English troops, plans were laid to capture the French fortifications about the lakes, while elsewhere Louisburg, on the Island of Cape Breton,[1] was to be retaken, and in the west Fort Du Quesne was to be captured.

[1] See the "Young Gunbearer" for account of this fort in 1745.

Rogers and his Rangers were making their headquarters at Fort Edward, formerly known as Fort Lyman, early in the year 1758, when word came in that Captain Putnam [1] had been recalled from an extended scout into the region about the head of Lake Champlain, on account of several misadventures, not the least of which was the desertion of one of his men to the enemy's ranks, carrying to them a statement of the numbers and condition of the English.

Immediately Captain Rogers was ordered to place himself at the head of four hundred of his Rangers and march against the enemy located about Fort Carillon. Ever willing to carry out an order of this kind, the Ranger chief lost no time in preparing for his work, acting with his usual promptness. But he was disappointed to find that so many men could not be mustered for the occasion, and he finally found himself in command of less than two hundred men, including officers.

Captain Rogers was extremely loath to enter upon this expedition, knowing the French had been apprised of this plan, and that they, with their Indian allies, were prepared to meet them. But the commander was determined he should go, and on the 10th of March the Rangers started on their perilous mission of trying to rout the enemy lying

[1] Israel Putnam of Horse-neck ride fame.

in wait for them. Among them were our old friends Ben and Alex. Lieutenant William Stark's company was very fortunately not included in this service.

A little after nightfall the entire party went into camp on the east side of what was known as "The First Narrows" of the Horican. This was opposite the "great toe" of Tongue Mountain, and just below the entrance of the "North Arm." This is one of the most picturesque portions of the lake, the water being dotted with a prodigal hand with islands clothed then in their virgin forests.

As soon as camp had been pitched Captain Rogers sent Ben in charge of a small party on a scout down the shore to see if any signs of the enemy could be found, it having been rumoured that a force was on its way to attack the English fort.

Not daring to move down the lake upon their skates, as they would be more exposed to the enemies in the openings of the pond, the scouts moved silently under cover of the forest upon their snowshoes, Ben himself leading the way. It was very dark and the dense undergrowth made their progress tedious, but with the accustomed steadfastness of men trained for the work they kept steadily ahead, until their leader judged they had gone three miles, or as far as Captain Rogers had told him to go.

They had now come to a little cove of water covered with its crystal top, but over the lake and the forest hung a silence which seemed to speak of the utter absence of a human being. No sign of the Indians had been discovered, and Ben was confident none were within the vicinity, and with this assurance from his comrades, he was about to turn back to the camp when the clear note of a bugle-horn fell softly on the evening air!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TREMENDOUS JOURNEY

In a moment there came into Ben's mind the memory of another day when the sound of that horn had fallen on his ears with promise of joy, and he quickly exclaimed:

"The Woodranger, or I am greatly mistaken!"

"So it must be, Ensign Browne," replied a comrade. "It has been more than three years since I have heard it, but I cannot be mistaken. The old man is alive, and near by."

"A quarter of a mile or such a matter below here," replied Ben. "I will answer it."

Placing his hands to his mouth so as to form a tunnel-shaped opening, the young Ranger blew softly upon his impromptu horn, the note floating away upon the still air with a clearness which quite surprised his companions. Then the little group listened and waited for a reply. But in this they seemed doomed to disappointment. When five minutes had passed without bringing any response, Ben's companion declared:

"There was some mistake. It was not the old

Woodranger, or he would have replied sooner. In my opinion we cannot get out of this too soon. It was an Indian signal."

"I cannot think so, Dave. We will wait a few minutes longer. It is possible he did not think it safe to reply with his horn, but he will come to us."

Ben had barely finished speaking when a low voice said:

"Now's me, lad, you trail thought like a prophet."

"The Woodranger!" exclaimed Ben, joyfully, and then the forester stepped boldly into sight, his tall figure erect and his step as light as ever.

"Hush, lads!" warned the newcomer, as two or three of the Rangers were about to express their pleasure in tones more expressive of delight than of caution. "There be too many brown-faces lurking hereabouts to allow a waste o' discretion."

"Then you think the French are in this vicinity, Woodranger?" asked Ben.

"Not clus by, lad; that is, elbows to you. But they be on the war-trail just below, and ready to swoop down on you as so many wolves. A good scout is never alarmed at sign o' danger," he added, as if to remove the impression of immediate peril his first words had given.

"Right, Woodranger," said Ben. "You do not

know how glad we are to see you alive and well. Where have you been all this long time?"

"Been, lad? Ask the deer where he stalked last year; the bird that winters in the southland and seeks the northland in summer. Have I been gone overlong? The time o' separation seems short when the return is gladdened with a hearty welcome. What cheer, lad?"

"Nothing of great moment, Woodranger. We are still fighting the war that was begun before you went away. Rob Rogers is three miles above here, encamped with a goodly number of the boys."

"That is news that falls like the tinkling water o' spring on the old man's ears. Mebbe he'll perambulate along with you, if you are going to camp. But before the ol' man trails with you he has a skein for you to unravel — a knot to be untied."

"Anything we can do, Woodranger, you have only to ask."

"You speak like a true friend. I left a comrade just below too weak o' foot to perambulate farther, and — and I can ne'er previcate the truth — the ol' man was too snow-clod to pull him farther. Aweel, lad, do not blame the ol' man, but lay it to the years — years that battle ag'in natur' with a hol' she canna break. I'm ashamed o' myself, I swan I am, lad."

Ben now noticed that the Woodranger showed

signs of great exhaustion. In fact, the pleasure and excitement of the unexpected meeting somewhat abated, he saw that it was with difficulty that the forester could keep upon his feet. His countenance was drawn, as if with pain and long endured hardships, while the eye retained little of its natural lustre. The long firearm was indeed a staff to him now, for without it, as he stood there in his favourite attitude, he must have sunk upon the snow.

"You are sick, Woodranger!" cried Ben, with unfeigned alarm. "Something has happened to you."

"'Tis nothing, lad. A weakness natural to an ol' man. Mebbe the journey was overlong, or, like a painter that fights in the dark, a gale that binds its own arms and whips out its own breath with its onreasonable fury, I did not take keerful measure o' my own strength. That goes to show we ne'er profit in the present by a foolishness o' the past. But go, lad! he waits you. And say, tell him the ol' man has ne'er desarted him, but must let him think so for the time. You'll tell him something like that, lad. And while you are going back for him I'll perambulate on to the camp o' Rogers. Nay, now I wind a spare breath, I will keep here till you come along. Trail a sharp eye for the brown-faces, lad."

Ben did not stop to reply, but with another, leav-

ing two to remain with the Woodranger, he swiftly followed the trail which had been left by the forester. The young Ranger could not help wondering who it was he had been sent to find, but his suspense was of short duration, for they had not gone more than two hundred rods before he discovered a large, heavy, and roughly made hand-sled drawn up under a thicket of running hemlock. Simultaneous with this discovery was another of even greater surprise, though really expected. Lying at full length upon the sledge, wrapped in warm skins with the fur on, was the figure of a man.

"Hilloa, sir!" greeted Ben, in a low, cautious tone, stopping beside the motionless form, "I think you must be the man the Woodranger sent us to find."

At the sound of his voice the stranger moved slightly, and raising his head so as to look upon the young Ranger, he replied, feebly:

"I am Wallace Briant. The Woodranger left me a few minutes since saying he had found friends, and that he would be back in a minute."

"He was unable to come back, Mr. Briant," said Ben. "He seems pretty well worn out."

"Worn out? That man must have a frame of iron and a will of steel. Why, sir, he has dragged me alone through the pathless forest for more than

two hundred miles. I am wounded and sick. I told him it would be useless, but nothing that I could say would stop him. He carried me one whole day in his arms, when the bullets of the enemies flew about us like hailstones. It was a miracle he was not shot down. He bears a charmed life. Tired out, the wonder is he is not dead. But a nobler man never lived. Only his watchful care has saved me."

"Are you Alex Briant's father?" asked Ben, remembering that his companion had called his father by the name of Wallace.

"I am. Then you know Alex! He may be near! He lives?"

"He is with our party to-night. I left him at camp with Captain Rogers, Mr. Briant. He will be glad to see you."

"To see me. Oh, the joy of this hour compensates for the suffering I have borne. Can you tell me of his mother? I dare not ask if she lives."

"She lives, Mr. Briant, and is now at Albany, safe and well. But she has long mourned you as dead."

"I have been close down to death's door. I owe my life to him, the bravest, best friend a man ever had."

Ben could see that this excitement was exhausting the sick man, so he admonished him to remain

as quiet as possible, while they took him to camp. When he, assisted by another, came to pull the sled along through the trackless snow, he could not help exclaiming:

"I do not see how the Woodranger could pull this alone."

"He must indeed have arms of iron, and I do not wonder he is played out," replied Ben's companion.

When they returned to the place where they had left him they found the Woodranger resting on the muzzle of his musket just as they had left him.

He started up at their approach, but said nothing, while he fell in behind the sled, as it was dragged ahead toward camp.

Nothing was said during that journey, which required about an hour's time in its performance. Their appearance was the signal for some alarm, which quickly resolved itself into wonder, while the Rangers pressed forward to see who had thus come into their presence. There was many a hearty shaking of the hand for the Woodranger, the foremost and most hearty coming from Captain Rogers, who anxiously inquired concerning his fortunes.

"Have you seen signs of the Indians, Woodranger?"

"Ay, lad, that I have. They be like the leaves o' the forest, and they are painted for war."

"True, Woodranger. But you are exhausted, and must lie down. Perhaps first you will share with us the fare we have. Forgive —"

"Tut — tut, Rob. 'Tis only a passing weakness. Here comes the lad to greet his sire. I swan it does these ol' eyes good to trail sich an amazement."

The identity of Wallace Briant by this time had become known, and Alex, with what joy and surprise may be imagined, met his long-lost father, whom he had supposed killed upon the fateful day he and his mother had been driven out of Acadia. At sight of this reunion of father and son the Rangers withdrew to a respectful distance, feeling that it was too sacred for them to witness, and while they conversed thus apart among themselves many an unbidden tear coursed down cheeks that had become weather-worn and war-beaten.

In his great joy and outpouring of his emotions Wallace Briant did not forget to recount some of the heroic sacrifices the Woodranger had made for him. In his story it was learned that the banishment of the Acadians had been accomplished, and that his family had not been the only ones to suffer.

"I never expected to see you or your mother again," he said, "and if I do it is due entirely to that grand man who would not leave me even when I, believing it would be useless for him to try and

save me, begged of him to do so. Oh, that journey for two hundred miles through a trackless forest much of the way, and always through a country overrun with enemies, — I cannot describe it to you now, though I may be spared to do it some time. Can I hope to reach Albany, where your mother, they tell me, is stopping?"

"I wish I could go with you, father, but I fear I cannot. You know I belong to the regular army as one of Captain Rogers' Rangers."

"I know it, my son, and I would not have you disobey your orders or neglect your duties. I will get there somehow, if my life is spared me. The Woodranger certainly cannot go farther at present."

"Look here, Alex," said Captain Rogers, who had overheard a portion of this conversation, "I have a plan which will serve us both. I want to send word to headquarters of what we have learned, and you can go back, taking your father with you. I will also detail two men to go with you. To be frank, I do not think it will be best to let your father remain with us longer than we can help. I have not said so to the boys, but, in my opinion, we are likely to get into the hottest corner we have found yet."

"You are very kind, Captain Rogers. I hope the Woodranger will be able to go with us."

So it was decided that Mr. Briant's journey should be resumed as speedily as might be done with consideration in regard to his strength. One of the Rangers made a broth from choice portions of meat, and the best at their command was given him. After eating this, and enjoying an hour's rest, he declared that he was ready to start again. In truth, a sort of feverish anxiety to reach Albany possessed him which no words of his companions could remove. But he was determined that the Woodranger, who had come with him so far, should continue on to his destination. The latter shook his head, saying:

"Nay, man, that canna be. There be personal p'ints which trail the other way. I have done my best, little enough man knows, but all that I could do, all that I can do. Forgive me if I pain you with my stubbornness. I should pain you in my weakness o' going. Nay — nay — nay! that can never be, I swan it can't. Natur' calls to me in words that brook no denial. Go, man, go! may you live long to bless her life, and remember kindly the ol' man with a cross."

Alex now joined his solicitations with those of his father to have the Woodranger go on with them, but nothing could be said to cause him to do so. Holding the hand of Briant for a moment in his, he turned resolutely away, though Ben and a

few others who were nearest saw that the tears were rolling down his cheeks like rain. He trembled in his walk, but that may have been due to his recent trying experiences. Wallace Briant was weeping like a woman, while he murmured, softly:

"Farewell — fare thee well, noble man. Something tells me we may never meet again. Farewell!"

Without further loss of time Alex and his companions started upon the homeward journey, pulling the sled after them as rapidly as they could walk. Their way now wound around the islands dotting the lake, where the snow was now deep, and much of the course covered with smooth ice. The Wood-ranger had turned back to the camp-fire, as if refusing to watch them out of sight. He had paused by the trunk of a stately yellow birch, and as he leaned against the tree he said to his companions:

"Aweel, now's me, man is but a tree among the forests o' the races. In the spring, which is the youth o' manhood, he dons his best raiment and holds his head above his fellow beings. In the summer-time he begins to droop; in the autumn, with the frost touching his head, he tries to conceal the way-marks o' time by putting on brighter cloth; but in the winter-age, he stands stark and lonely. Does not his kindred o' the wood without speech

trail some sich an amazement? Only Natur' does not do her mourning in sombre colours or with tears. When the seal o' death is laid on her she puts on her brightest, and lays aside her royal robes like a queen. Mind you the spark o' humanity in this tree, which has found sustenance from the virtues o' another — mightier it may be, but mightiest in the fruit that has sprung from its bosom."

The others now saw that the birch was upheld by a tripod of stout, purple-hued roots, which had been freed of the encircling snow by the fire. These roots encircled the prostrate form of what had once been a gigantic pine, but which now lay covered with the leaves of many autumns and transformed into wood-moss, lichen, and various strange formations, until they looked like mummies wrapped in the soft scurf. The sap of the wood had been transmuted into a rime of yellowish hue by the rains and snows, the moistures and shadows of the woodland.

"Mind how tenderly the roots o' the birch entwine the ancient king, as well it might, for the sap o' the one has been its own support, and much of the material from which it has drawn its own life. Remove this wrapping and you'll find underneath the heart o' the pine, whose flesh is the hue o' a steak o' salmon cut from the river's rarest catch.

Ay, there be, to me, much in the tree to remind o' man."

Captain Rogers was already preparing for the night, and knowing the danger hanging over them, he ordered that men patrol the adjoining lake all night, while sentries should be maintained around the camp. When these plans had been put in force, the rest of the Rangers rolled themselves in their blankets, and inside of half an hour complete silence lay over the camp.

All were astir early, so that by sunrise the entire body was moving silently down the shore, the Woodranger having decided to accompany the Rangers. No sign of the enemy had been discovered yet, but when they had advanced about three miles, one of the scouts discovered a dog coming across the ice toward them. Thinking a party of Indians might be ambushed on an island nearly opposite, and from whence it appeared the dog had come, a small party of scouts under Ben were immediately despatched to look for the enemy.

But they had not gone far before the approaching canine was recognized as an old friend.

It was Sergeant Beau de Bien!

To say that this fine old friend was not given a cordial reception would be to state an untruth. And they were not one bit less glad to see him than he was to meet them. He jumped up against one

after another, licked their hands, and finally completed his exhibition of happiness by rolling over and over in the snow.

"There can be no enemies where the Sergeant comes from," said Ben. "Still we will reconnoitre the island. Will you go, old fellow?"

As Ben had predicted, no signs of the enemy were to be found on the island, but Captain Rogers did not think it safe for them to continue down the lake in broad daylight, so the entire company crossed over the ice to where a bend in the lake makes a point of land which commands an extensive view both up and down the shore, and being low and level did not expose the persons stopping here to the gaze of any chance passer-by.[1] Here the Rangers prepared to pass the day as quietly as possible.

Scouting parties were sent out with perspective glasses to look for the enemy, but the day passed without adventure. The following night proved to be very dark, so they had to move with extreme caution. An advance-guard of fifteen men, among whom were Ben and the Woodranger, who had recovered somewhat from his recent trying experiences, went ahead on skates, while another body flanked the main troops on the left, the entire company keeping closely into the west shore.

[1] Sabbath Day Point. — AUTHOR.

The main body was thus moving slowly down the shore, and had got within about eight miles, as it afterward proved, of the advance-guard of the French, when Ben discovered a fire on the east shore. The order to halt was quickly given, and the men commanded to drop flat upon the ice. Lieutenant Philips,[1] in command, immediately started back to warn Major Rogers of the close proximity of the foe.

[1] Not to be confounded with Philip the Sokokis. He was a half-breed who did good service through the French and Indian war. — AUTHOR.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LOST BATTLE

CAPTAIN ROGERS ordered that scouts be sent forward to investigate in regard to the fire, and while this was being done his men remained crouching close to the ice and as motionless as possible.

Ben was again among the four sent forward to reconnoitre, the Woodranger remaining behind. The scouts now crept cautiously toward the fire, which began to die down by this time, and caused them a little wonder and speculation. Upon reaching the shore of the island it was found that the land rose gradually from the edge of the water, and that the bright light seen must have been near the centre of the isle.

The island was heavily wooded, and the night still keeping dark, the four crawled forward with extreme caution, expecting any moment to find themselves attacked by the Indians who they had reasons to believe were all around them. Thus fully half an hour was taken in creeping up the side of the ascent, only to find at its summit a few smouldering coals. But this was evidence that

some one had been there recently, and from the manner the fire had been built it was decided that it had been a white man. This being the case it was also quite certain he had not only fled upon discovering the presence of the Rangers, but that he had carried the news of their approach to his friends. It indeed proved to be the case, and was the cause which brought them such fearful work before the affair was ended.

The scouts returned with greater haste than they had exercised in coming, so inside of an hour they were able to report the result of their exploit to Captain Rogers. For the balance of the night the Rangers remained inactive. In the morning, thinking it safer to keep under the cover of the forest, the entire force marched upon snowshoes until noon, when a halt was made. They were now within two miles of the advance-guard of the French, and on the west side of the low mountain overlooking the shore.

Remaining at the rendezvous until three o'clock, the regiment was divided into two parts, and the order given to advance. The snow was here four feet deep, and it was very hard to move on snowshoes. But with great difficulty they marched a mile and a half, and were keeping close to the base of the mountain, when one of the scouts, continually on the lookout, reported that about a hundred

Indians, with three French officers, had been discovered coming that way.

In spite of his protests the Woodranger was placed in charge of an advance-guard, and as the order was given to lay aside the packs, he advanced with his men so as to form a flank to the right of the main body. The whole force was now deployed along the ridge overlooking the bank of a rivulet along which the enemies were marching, apparently unconscious as yet of their presence.

Captain Rogers waited until the front of the enemy's column was directly opposite, when he discharged his gun. This was the signal for the others to fire, and a deadly volley was poured into the midst of the surprised red men. It was estimated that over forty were killed by this terrible discharge, and the survivors broke and fled in wild disorder.

"Head them off," shouted Rogers to the Woodranger, who at once advanced double-quick upon the heels of the fleeing enemies, and into what proved a death-trap.

The keen-sighted Woodranger had not taken half a dozen steps before he saw that the first party had been only an advance-guard sent out by the French, and that the main body, numbering over six hundred, was close at hand.

"Quick — to kiver!" cried the forester.

Seeing their peril, the Rangers sought cover with

all the haste possible. In spite of their swift action fifty of their number were shot down before they could gain the vantage-ground where they had left their packs. Here Captain Rogers ordered them to make a stand, and there began at once one of the hottest skirmishes that took place during the entire war.

Outnumbered by the enemy seven to one, the brave Rangers were resolved to stand their ground to the bitter end. The mountain formed a natural protection for their rear, but their front was open to the raking fire of the Canadians and Indians making up the French force, who stormed in vain the little band of Rangers, and were soon obliged to retreat.

Captain Rogers, while rallying his men for another defence, knew they were in no condition to follow up their advantage, even if such a course would have ensured them the utter rout of the enemy. So the Rangers saw their enemies recover somewhat from their second repulse, and once more they attacked them.

About this time it was discovered that two hundred Indians were ascending the mountain, to hurl themselves down upon the Rangers on their rear. Rogers was also suspicious that some of the main body of the Canadians might endeavour to gain their left, and thus help to surround them. To

check the first manœuvre Lieutenant Philips was sent with eighteen men to the summit, while another squad of fifteen was sent to act in the other direction. Though these squads lessened the numbers to stand the brunt of battle in front, it was the best that could be done.

Confident of victory, the enemy now made a furious onset against the main body of the Rangers commanded by Captain Rogers in person. Ben and the Woodranger were now near together on the extreme left, where the charge was the fiercest.

"Stand back a leetle to my right," said the forester. "Back by that rock, lad. It be more seemly that young life should be spared than the old. And I tell you, lad, not many o' us are coming out o' this amazement. Rob is doing his best, but it's ten to one ag'in him."

A volley of bullets then mowed past them like the hail of a summer tempest, cutting down every second man. Ben Browne turned pale, and felt certain that he should never come out of that fight alive. The yells of the Indians vied with the reports of their firearms, as they strove madly to reach the brave boys at bay.

More than a hundred Rangers went down to rise no more, and Captain Rogers, seeing that it was surrender or retreat, chose the last course, when he shouted for his men to retreat up the hill to

join Lieutenant Philips. About twenty followed him, and these with the others prepared to pour a galling fire down upon the enemies at the foot of the hill. Then three hundred Indians surrounded Lieutenant Philips, and Rogers called out to him to look out for himself and men.

"I think I can make good terms of surrender," he replied. "If I can't I will fight till the last man falls."

The undaunted spirit of brave "Bill" Philips was felt by every Ranger, who resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible. Even Lige Bitlock, who thus far had kept as much as possible in the background, showed that he possessed when brought to bay the courage that makes men heroes. He was lying behind a rock not far from Ben and the Woodranger, where the bullets of the enemies were flying thick and fast.

From one direction in particular shots were coming that were cutting down their comrades on every hand. The Woodranger finally discovered that many of these deadly shots were fired at regular intervals from a big stump standing within easy range. Looking closely at the object the keen gaze of the Woodranger soon saw that the muzzle of a musket was pushed into the orifice left by a knot once forming a part of the wood.

"That be a discreet cunning," murmured the

forester, softly, a smile overspreading his bronzed visage, while he carefully reloaded his own weapon.

In a moment a thin wreath of smoke curled about the spot, while another deadly missile sought its victim among his friends.

"Your last," said the Woodranger, "unless ol' Danger has lost his gift o' war."

The forester had quickly concluded that immediately after firing his weapon the savage would want to note the effect of his shot, and so he brought his own firearm to bear upon the bull's-eye in the stump. Scarcely had the report of his gun rung out before a huge Iroquois warrior leaped from behind his covert with his death-yell upon his lips.

"Well done, ol' Danger!" declared the pleased woodsman, beginning to reload his weapon with rapid movements. At this moment, seeing that it was madness to continue the unequal fight longer, Captain Rogers sang out:

"Each man to himself."

Then a mere handful of the one hundred and eighty men who had entered the fight sought safety in flight, scattering to the four winds in their wild endeavours to escape the enemies that lay in wait for them behind every tree and rock, every bush and hummock of earth. To follow the individual fortunes of these brave fellows would be to repeat

"'YOUR LAST,' SAID THE WOODRANGER, 'UNLESS OL' DANGER HAS LOST HIS GIFT O' WAR.'"

narratives of hairbreadth escapes and deeds of valour that would outrival any of the records of the so-called days of chivalry. One doughty Ranger, who had been in the thickest of the fight, sought to evade his foes by following along under the cover of a huge fallen tree, which had lain for years until covered with vines and overlaid with a carpet of leaves. Reaching at last the end of the great log, and flattering himself that he had got beyond range of his enemies, he passed around the end toward another place of concealment, when he found himself face to face with a tall Huron warrior, who it seemed had crept along the opposite side of the fallen tree, simultaneously with him.

With a fierce war-cry the surprised Indian levelled his firearm pointblank at the Ranger. But he was no swifter of action than the latter, and the reports of their weapons rang out as one. The two foemen sank to the earth side by side, and neither rose again.

At the outset of the retreat Ben found himself separated from the Woodranger, who had been near him throughout the fight, and though disappointed at losing the companionship of the forester, and fearing that he had fallen before the fire of the foe, the young Ranger started at a swift pace down the side of the mountain, followed by two

others, one of whom proved to be Lige Bitlock, though at the time Ben did not know it.

Near the foot of the descent Ben found that they were entering a narrow pass which had evidently been a main way of reaching to the top of the ascent by the French and Indians. Smart firing came up to them from the path ahead, and Lige Bitlock proclaimed his presence by exclaiming:

"We're lost! we're goners!"

His long yellow hair was streaming in the wind, and his thin features, stained with powder, looked white and terrified. He had lost his gun, and he looked very little then like one who, in after-years, was frequently heard to boast of having fought with Rogers and his Rangers in the days of the French invasion. But that was not a time to think of personal appearances, when every man of that brave band was straining every nerve, and exercising every artifice of warfare known to him in trying to escape an enemy whose vengeance never slept.

"They are not firing at us," cried Ben, the foremost of the trio. "Look by that big rock, where the path is narrowest. What is that rolling in blood? My God! it is the Sergeant!"

If the impressive speech of the young Ranger has an appearance of profanity, I think he may be forgiven the sin. But it was not uttered in the spirit

of an oath. The sight was enough to stir the blood of a dullard, and the words were but the honest expression of Ben's feelings.

It seemed that the brave dog, in some manner separated from the men, had, alone and of his own free will, taken his station here, where he had held at bay all who had attempted to reach the mountain-top by the path. And now, covered with blood, every spark of the wolf in his nature aroused, intrenched behind a breastwork of the dead bodies of those he had slain, he still held his post in spite of every effort to rout him.

"Come on!" cried Ben; "fire as you come."

The two shots coming from him and one of his companions, together with their cries, caused the Indians to think reinforcements were coming, and they turned upon their heels and fled wildly down the pass.

"Follow me!" shouted Ben. "Now is our time. Hilloa, Sergeant! come with us."

Random firing in the distance answered this bold defiance of the young Ranger, while a series of yells from the crest of the hill seemed to mock his hopes of an escape.

The gallant Sergeant, as surprised as any human being must have been by this sudden appearance of old acquaintances, seemed unable to gather his scattered and bewildered wits for a moment, and

it was not until, calling to him again, Ben and his companions leaped the barrier of bodies in their pathway and bounded away, the true hero of the pass uttered a cry of delight, and rushed upon their heels.

This dangerous place passed, Ben found himself near the shore of the lake, and hearing the enemies below, he wheeled about and ran along the margin of ice as swiftly as his feet could bear him. Somehow in the race that followed he became separated from his companions, even losing sight of the Sergeant. But he was not destined to get away as easily as he had hoped, for he had not got far ahead before he suddenly found himself surrounded by a party of howling Indians who had sprung from an ambuscade upon him. In less time than it could be described he was flung to the ground and bound hands and feet.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RETREAT

BEN'S hopes fell as the savages danced about him in frenzied glee. At first he imagined they meant to put him to death at once, but he soon found that they had worse designs upon him than a speedy end. He was to be reserved for the torture. It proved that while the majority of the Rangers had been killed, very few had been taken captives, and nothing so sated a savage's vengeance as a prisoner.

Here and there, like the echoes of the fierce battle recently fought, came to Ben's ears the report of a gun, telling him that the pursuit of the enemies was not yet entirely over, and each succeeding sound was to him the death-knell of a comrade. But after all were not they who had been shot down in the passion of battle better off than he? This led him to wonder what had become of the Woodranger, of Captain Rogers, Lige, the Sergeant, and the others who had finally sought safety in flight.

In the midst of these reflections the Indians began to move down the shore, making Ben march in their midst. At the least show of hanging back

he was sure to be prodded by one of his captors, who took especial delight in showing their power. After going half a mile the Indians left the shore and advanced on the ice.

One reason for this change of course was soon evident. The Indians had secured several pairs of skates during the fight, and these were a source of great wonder and pleasure to them. One big fellow, with a generous coating of red paint, and his Huronic plume of black hair made to stand up in uncommon fierceness, finally put on a pair of skates, but he had barely accomplished this part of his programme before he suddenly found his heels shooting out from under him, and himself standing on his head.

There is no record to show how many stars the Huron discovered in this inverted exploration of the frozen surface of the lake. His discomfiture brought forth a series of gibes and laughter from his companions that did not serve to smooth his ruffled temper. But he was quickly up again, and even quicker down to his former level. The next attempt was rewarded by a swift parting of his feet, when one shot out toward the middle of the lake, while its mate as unexpectedly took a sweep for the shore. With this sudden departure of both from under him the warrior naturally took a seat upon the ice with a force which made it look like the face

of a watch. This movement, while it did succeed in arresting the desertion of his feet, brought a deep and significant grunt from the ill-fated victim.

Satisfied by this time that skates were "bad medicine," he tore this pair from his feet, and flung them as far as he could out over the ice. His failure did not discourage others, and a couple of his companions, probably thinking they could show him greater cunning in the art, tried on their skates. Alas! for savage hopes. They failed as miserably as he had.

Ben was now watching them with looks of disdain, and finally he said:

"Indian like big clumsy boy! Can't stand on his feet! Squaws could do better. I could walk on the lightning track when I was only so high," indicating his height by holding his hand about two feet above the icy floor of the lake.

His words found the desired effect, for one of the Hurons, a leader of the party, asked him if he could do it now.

"Let me try, and I will show you," replied Ben.

After a short consultation the Indians agreed to give the captive a chance to teach them a lesson in skating. So Ben's hands were freed, and a pair of skates given him, while the Indians moved back so as to make room for him to move about, and yet to cut off any attempt he might make to escape.

Ben was more cunning than they had counted. Three years as one of Rogers' Rangers had taught him many tricks and schemes as sharp as those learned by the red men themselves.

So he met with no better success at first than his captors who had tried on the skates. His feet flew in every direction but the one he wanted them to follow, and he would tumble down, pick himself up and fall back sprawling upon the ice. It was such rare sport to the Indians that they became absorbed in his dilemmas, jeering him and calling him all manner of names. In this manner, growing more and more uncertain in his efforts, Ben struggled, scrambled, sprawled, and rolled all over the ice, even close to where his captors were encircling him. While he was doing this, appearing greatly ashamed over his repeated failures, he was waiting for the opportune time for him to break away.

His gun, which he prized highly, was in the possession of a warrior upon the farther side of the circle, so that he blundered and stumbled in that direction. He had just tried to rise to his feet, only to fall prone upon the ice, spread out like a huge spider. But as he fell he managed to hit the feet of the savage a blow which sent him flat, and the gun spinning away from him.

Then Ben suddenly showed his mettle. As quick as a flash he regained his feet, catching the firearm

as it flew toward him. With this in his hands, sending back a defiant laugh, the young Ranger shot out over the lake like an arrow from a mighty bow. Before the Indians could recover enough to realize that he was speeding away from them like a bird upon electric wings, he was far up on the lake, and going farther and farther each moment.

The discomfited red men fired a volley after their escaping captive, but their bullets flew wide of their mark, and the chase they gave was equally as futile. Ben soon left them quite out of sight, and that night he reached his friends at camp in safety.

Having followed Ben in his successful journey to camp, we will retrace our course to note the adventures, or at least a portion of the adventures that befell others of the more fortunate Rangers.

Soon finding himself separated from his companions, the forester, who had been in too many close quarters before to think anything serious of this situation, started to cross the backbone of the mountain. He had not gone many yards before the sharp click of a gun-lock warned him of the close proximity of an enemy.

The Woodranger quickly dodged behind a convenient tree, where he awaited the next move of his foe, whom he was well aware had sought the same sort of a shield as himself, that is, a big pine.

He could hear the sounds of other enemies on the side of the mountain, and he knew if he remained there long he was sure to be found and shot. His only hope lay in drawing the fire of his enemy in front as quickly as possible, when he would have him at his mercy.

Without delay, therefore, he resorted to the old device of placing his cap upon the muzzle of his gun, and began to push it slowly out into sight, as if its owner was trying to peer around the tree to find out if others were about. The Indian, for such his enemy was, quickly discovered the object, and recognized it as belonging to the man whom of all others he would most delight to kill. Knowing him to be a cunning foe, he resolved to improve his opportunity as quickly as he could, and no sooner had the cap come into sight than he took hasty aim and fired. His marksmanship was good, for the bullet just touched the bark of the tree, and pierced the cap, which the Woodranger lifted upward like a person making his death-spring, and then he fell backward into the bushes.

Like a true sportsman the red man did not run to look at his game until he should have reloaded his empty weapon. But this action proved his doom. The Woodranger was swiftly on his feet, and covering his victim with old Danger, he cried:

"It may be wanton slaying, but it's life for life. Say your prayers, you painted pagan, as fast as ever you can!"

As he uttered the last word the report of his firearm rang out, and his path was clear for him to continue his escape, which he did with certainty.

The escape of Captain Rogers was about as remarkable as any of them. Knowing him as the leader of the whites, the French and Indians looked upon him as a prize of greater worth to capture than any of the others. Thus the Ranger chief soon found himself pursued by a hundred of his foes. He was a good runner, and he had taken the precaution to put on a pair of snow-shoes before entering the deep growth, but it began to look as though he was not to get away. Still the doughty chief kept on and on, leading his enemies a merry race over hill and through valley. Sure of their game in the end, the Indians did not push him as hard as they might have done at the outset, but rather followed him close enough to prolong and enjoy what was to them rare sport.

"We catch big chief soon!" declared a swift-footed Huron, as he followed like a hound his prey. "Rogers too big-foot to run long. Me have him scalp to dry in my wigwam."

The fugitive laughed back in scorn, and seeing a good target in one of his pursuers, he fired his

trusty gun. A telltale yell showed to him that he had not wasted his powder.

The course of the Ranger was such that the Indians knew he was running into what they considered a trap. Ahead of him rose an elevation of land with a steep front dropping down to the lake by a sheer fall of over five hundred feet! While the ascent from this side was gradual there was no retreat should he reach the summit. All they had got to do was to follow on, closing in upon him as they advanced up the narrowing way.

Now they should have known that Robert Rogers was not one to run headlong into any such trap without some motive. He proved that he had one upon this critical occasion. No sooner had he gained the summit, where he could look down upon the icy floor half a thousand feet below him, than he took off his snow-shoes and put them on in a reversed position, so as to make it appear that he was going in an opposite direction from that which he was really following. Then, while his pursuers climbed leisurely the ascent, he descended on the side opposite to that by which he had come up.

Directly the Indians drew near the summit, finally beginning to wonder what had become of their prey. Then they saw two sets of tracks leading up the rising land until they met at the edge of the precipice. This led the Indians to conclude that

Rogers and another had come here, and rather than be captured had leaped to death upon the rocks below.

But this hopeful view was shattered in a moment, when they discovered, far out upon the lake, the form of the Ranger chief rapidly disappearing in the distance. Believing that he had slid down the precipice, and that he had been aided in that perilous feat by the Great Spirit, they abandoned further pursuit.

Captain Rogers reached Fort Edward in safety, there to recount the thrilling story of the disastrous ending of the expedition upon which he had been sent. No blame was attached to him, the belief of all being that it was almost a miracle that any escaped instead of so few. He was commissioned a major for his part in the heroic undertaking. The precipitous side of the bluff down which the Indians believed he had jumped was known for a long time as "Rogers' Rock," and today it is pointed out as the place of "Rogers' Slide."

CHAPTER XXVI.

REUNITED LIVES

"THERE *is* a man coming down the path. It is not the Woodranger! Who can it be?"

It was summer once more, and the tranquil peace of that fairest season of all the year rested upon the Horican and its environments. Ay, it was an uncommon peace that smiled benignly upon water and land, a joyful peace which had at last come to this beautiful retreat after more than a thousand years of warfare. Never more would the war-whoop of the warring red men echo up and down its sounding shores. Following in the footsteps of the ancient Horicans and the lordly Mohawks, the invading French had been driven back to their stronghold upon the rock of Quebec, and there suffered the ignominy of defeat. It is true the echo of these old-time battles was to be given when the struggle for American independence was to be practically decided here, but her first triumph had been won, and the scars of the long and bitter strife were already healing, for the wounds of Nature heal rapidly.

Upon this particular day and hour a heavy boat, common upon the waters of that vicinity during those times, carrying a dozen persons of both sexes, was moving sluggishly in the direction of the point of rock breasting the lake and half-encircling with its hornlike beak the little cove at the foot of the pathway leading up to the Lookout, which had been so long the home of the father and daughter, and later of the girl alone in her years of Crusoe life.

Seated in the bow of the boat at this time was the last-named person, looking fairer and more beautiful than upon the afternoon when we first met her. Her countenance now was radiant with expectation and happiness, for beside her sat her affianced lover, Alex Briant. He had served out his enlistment with Rogers' Rangers, and was looking hopefully forward to the building of a home for himself and loved ones.

Just behind them sat his mother, something of the warmth and cheerfulness of the summer scene enlivening her features, and restoring to them the grace and beauty of her younger years. She was alone now, Mr. Briant having lived but a few weeks after reaching her side, following that tremendous journey he had made under the almost superhuman efforts of the Woodranger.

Everybody had seemed to lose track of the latter,

except that it had been rumoured he had gone with Captain William Stark and Ben Browne, both of whom had joined the contingency of Rangers who served so faithfully under Wolfe in the siege and capture of Quebec. Word, however, had been received that he had been seen on the shore of the Horican within a few days, and it was in the hope that they might find him this party had come hither.

With the exception of the three already named they were strangers to us, and it does not seem necessary to introduce them in this passing notice. As the little company had begun to approach the place which had been the home of Indian Plume, and which she had longed, day by day, to visit, she had discovered the figure of a person moving slowly down the path leading to the water. Her announcement had brought from Alex the words quoted, and which confirmed her belief.

As she continued to gaze upon the stranger, while the boat was being carried rapidly in toward the shore, her whole form began to tremble and a light came into her eyes which frightened her companion.

"What is it, Bernice?" he asked, anxiously, addressing her by the name her parent had christened her, and which had been his mother's.

"Oh, Alex! Can it be? It must be! It is — *it is father!*" and she fain would have sprung into

the water in her unbounded eagerness to reach his side.

"Hush! Be calm, dearest. If it is your father —"

"Father! F-a-t-h-e-r!" she fairly shrieked, and then fell fainting in her lover's arms.

The man upon the shore, who had been watching the boat, and was coming to meet it with a great gladness in his heart, heard the words, and recognized the voice.

"My child — thank God!" he cried, and then, though the stout rowers were sending the boat swiftly in toward the shore, he could not brook the delay, and with uplifted arms rushed headlong out to meet it.

The speaker was a handsome man in middle life, whom Alex recognized as Lieutenant Berne, who figured as a French officer in the battle of Lake George. By the time he had reached it the boat was in shallow water, and it was speedily grounded upon the beach.

"My darling child!" murmured the overjoyed father, as he folded in his arms his long-lost daughter.

She soon recovered consciousness, and the reunited couple sobbed for joy in each other's embrace, while the others turned away to conceal their own emotions over the glad reunion.

"I have long given up looking for you, father, though my heart would never allow me to think I should never see you again."

"It has been a long, a cruel separation, my child," he said, the tears still coursing down his cheeks. "I came back here hoping against fate that I might find some trace of you. But when I found the old home in ruins, and you gone I knew not whither, I sat down in despair. I could not convince myself that you were living, and — "

"Let the memory pass, dear father. We have known enough of sorrow without living it over again. But you must tell me where you have been, why you never came back to me that day, and how it is I find you here now. But take your time, darling father, I am too happy now to think of it all."

So the two, in their happiness unable to more than notice their friends, talked in an incoherent sort of way for half an hour, saying much, but really telling little. Leaving them to gradually overcome the first transport of their joy, the others climbed the path leading to the summit, already growing faint from disuse. Upon reaching the little plateau, still encircled with the rim of hemlocks, broken down at places, it was found that the stone house lay in ruins — a shapeless pile of rocks and débris.

"The work of the French," declared Alex. "Probably they thought it was some outpost of our forces."

When she whom we have known longest as Indian Plume was told this, she expressed no desire to visit the spot that day. At some other time she might wish to do so, but she did not wish to mar the happiness of the present moment with a shadow. So it was planned to start at once upon a return to the settlement.

"As I came up the lake this morning," said Lieutenant Berne, "I saw a strange-looking white man by the shore a few miles below here. He looked so uncivilized, but withal so picturesque, that I could not help taking a second look at him. And as I passed on he waved his coonskin cap to me, but vanished the next moment, and when I went ashore he was not to be found. Who could he have been? Is there some hermit living in this vicinity? It was near the falls below here I saw him."

"Describe him, father," said his daughter. "He may have been the Woodranger."

The description given by Lieutenant Berne of the man he had seen agreed so closely with that of the forester that it was the unanimous desire of the party to keep on down to the falls. And while this pleasant stage of their journey was being made, he told the following brief story of his life, which

explained much of the mystery overshadowing him:

"My name is Roland Berne, and I come of a French family in good standing. My mother was an English gentlewoman. But trouble entered our family soon after father's marriage, I think, for by the time I had grown to manhood they had thickened so that my father was seized and thrown into prison, charged with being false to the king. I took up the cudgel in his defence, and the consequence was neither of us gained by it. He was executed, mother died of a broken heart, and I was forced to flee the country. Eventually I found my way into this region, and meeting and falling in love with a beautiful Indian princess, with no thought of ever returning to my native land, I married her. Then, loving the solitude and the solace of freedom, I built a stone house upon one of the most beautiful terraces of the mountain that I could find, and upon a spot where my wife and I could look out over the fair Horican as the years flew by.

"Our cup of happiness seemed filled when you came to bless our lonely lives, my dear daughter, but the shadow fell deep and dark when your mother was taken from us, and I realized that I had only you between me and the world.

"Upon the afternoon that I left you, Bernice,

with the promise and expectation of returning to you within the hour, I ran across a party of my countrymen who instantly recognized me as the outlaw for whose head a prize was offered. In defiance of my protests I was taken and carried away to Quebec, where I was thrown into prison, and word of my capture was sent to Paris. You can have only a faint conception of what I suffered, knowing in all likelihood I should never see my dear child again, whom I knew then must be crying for me, and wondering where I was that I did not come back to her.

"After long and vexatious delays I was sent to France, and there placed on trial for high treason. Oh, the miserable farce of it all! But I was helpless, and the only ray of light that came to me was after a long period, when I was offered my liberty if I would take arms in the wars of France. They had failed in their charges against me, and took this way to clear themselves. Of course I accepted the offer, and eventually found myself serving under Baron Dieskau in his campaign into this country.

"Some of you may know that I participated in the unfortunate battle waged above here, and that I was taken a prisoner. It seemed again as if fate was determined to do her worst with me, for I was sent with others a prisoner of war to England.

Again followed long and vexatious delays, until it is only now that I am at last able to find myself restored to the scenes that I love so well, and you, my dear daughter, who have never been out of mind in all these long, anxious years."

"Poor father! How you have suffered. But it is over at last, and we will think only of the happiness in store for us."

"Well said, my child, and a hearty amen to it all. What a beautiful day, and where can one find such scenery as this?"

The bright cheer of the reunited father and daughter served to make light-hearted their companions, and with these sweet influences entering their lives, hallowed by the soft delicacy of the summer atmosphere and the peacefulness of the water and the forest surrounding them, they moved silently down the silvery pathway. The islands grew more plentiful and their outlines softer and more restful, until they seemed hopelessly encompassed in their bewildering maze. Then there was a conscious narrowing of the waterway, as if the flood was gathering its forces for a united effort in a race for a broader life. Finally Lieutenant Berne said in a low tone, as if fearful he should startle the inhabitants of the solitude:

"It must have been near this place that I saw him."

The prow of the boat was headed toward the bank, and no sooner had its keel grated on the white sand than Alex leaped out upon the land. Trembling so she could scarcely stand, his mother rose to follow her son. He gently assisted her to step ashore, and seeing how deeply she was agitated he whispered:

"Be calm, mother! Lean upon His strong arm and you shall find strength for your feet."

"My son — my son —" she began, but did not finish her thought. He understood and slowly led her away from the shore, but in a direction which he knew would take them nearer the waterfall mentioned by Lieutenant Berne. As if they appreciated the sacred import of the scene to follow, the others remained behind, the boatmen to look after their craft and speak in subdued tones of bygone days, the father and daughter to whisper sweet words of consolation and happiness.

"What if he is not there?" this gentle, pale-faced woman, with the sorrow of years upon her life sweetened by the noble influences of other lives, kept saying to herself.

In silence Alex led his mother along the forest path overhung with the sweet-scented boughs of the smaller growth fringing the stream whose bank they were following.

"Hark, mother! I hear the sound of tumbling

waters. Ha! There is his camp. What a beautiful spot for one to pitch his tent."

She saw through the mist that had come into her vision a rude camp, and the embers of a fire that had been left to burn out, as if the builder had no further use for it.

"He is gone!" she said. "We are too late."

"Here are fresh footsteps leading down to the water," he replied. "And see! There he stands by the water's edge. He has seen us. He trembles — he is moving away! Go to him, mother. It will be better if I go back to the others."

His tall form outlined with marked clearness in the untainted atmosphere of the primeval retreat, the Woodranger turned abruptly around to look upon those who had dared to intrude into his domain. The frosts of time had added a few pencilled lines to his long, dark hair and beard, but the countenance was as hale and hearty as when last we saw him at Sabbath Day Point upon that fateful March morning when he was with Rogers' Rangers in the disastrous fight which cost them so dear.

Seeing that one at least of those who had invaded his sanctuary was a woman, he stood like a frightened deer not knowing whether to flee or stand his ground. The heavy stock of his firearm dropped to the earth, as if the weapon was of no further use to him, and he crossed his arms upon

its muzzle, while his lips moved as if they would fain yield the pent-up feelings bound by the rigid cords of silence.

She gazed upon him in speechless joy for a moment, and then the womanly heart in her cried out:

"Oh, Alick! Found at last!"

"Mary!" came slowly, softly from his lips, as if he feared to dispel the sweet illusion by the utterance of that dear name.

"Ye ne'er came to me, Alick, so I've come to ye." Then more slowly she added: "Canna ye ne'er forgi' me?"

For once "Old Danger" was forgotten, and unable to stand alone, it fell to the ground, where it lay unnoticed. Slowly the long arms of the Woodranger were outstretched in mute appeal to her. With a low cry of gladness she rushed forward, and a moment later she rested in his protective embrace.

So long and quiet did they remain standing there that the creatures of the wildwood, which had been frightened into silence themselves by this intrusion, overcame their fears and gave expression to their notes of freedom. The squirrel chattered noisily and whisked about in fantastic glee. The bird chirped his melodious song in a high key. The speckled trout, that may never have been stilled but for the alarm of his neighbours in fur and feather,

darted hither and thither, leaving behind him a bright trail of light wherever he went.

But silence is the forceful language of the deepest emotions, and the beautiful dream of that meeting between the twain separated for more than thirty years could not have been expressed otherwise. She proved the more timid now of the two, or else it may have been she was more fearful that the whole scene might vanish at the first sound of a voice.

"Aweel, now's me, the waiting has been overlong." Then, starting suddenly backward, and holding her at arm's length, he said impressively:

"Ay, forgive the ol' man for his indiscretion and his weakness. Wha' o' him?"

She understood and hastened to reply:

"Asleep with those who have gone before us, Alick. God knows I tried to be a true wife to him, without ever knowing the wrong I had done. They told me you were dead, and in my loneliness I believed it."

"Ne'er chide thyself, lass, for the simple part done unknowingly. Ignorance is innocence, and knowledge alone creates evil. I have been dead to the world these many years. Unfearing I come stumbling back to you, lass."

The joy upon her countenance kindled at the utterance of that word, which recalled so vividly an-

other scene and another meeting in the fair days of memory.

"Do you remember," she asked, timidly, as if afraid he had forgotten, "the evening we met by the bonnie burn of old Loch Karn, when you held my hand in yours and promised never to forget? It was some such a place as this, and some such a day."

"I ne'er dissemble the truth, lass," he said, reverently, and then, as if he would more fully complete the picture which had never vanished from his mind, he locked his arm in hers, and silently, slowly they descended side by side the rocky bank, until they stood under the gauze-like shield of the canopied waters that rolled like an endless ribbon from a mighty spool forever turning. Through a rift in the forest made by the silvery stream the sunlight playing upon the spray tinted it with the hues of the rainbow, while the south wind lifted gently the silken folds.

She slipped slightly upon the wet rock, and in trying to save her he caught her hand. With a thrill of pleasure he held it fast. And she forgot to claim it. Perhaps her mind was far away trying to solve the mystery of the river carrying its offering to the sea, always going and never returning. It was in reality much farther away — back to the days of her early womanhood, and her home

by the brawling burn in native Scotland. What a leap even for memory!

"Now's me," he began, but somehow the words fainted upon his tongue, and left him with the memory of thirty years ago, when he, too, was young and had known the depth of a man's love. They unconsciously drew nearer, to stand closely side by side upon a little rock-shelf overhanging the water and typical of their circumscribed lives. They had forgotten to admire the beauty of their surroundings. Even he, with his sanguine, philosophical mind, became oblivious of all else save that he stood by her from whom he had been separated so long. Now they seemed a part of their surroundings, of the rugged rocks, emblematical of their constancy of faith; the broken waters, of their severed and reunited hopes; the shifting spray, the rending wind, the sunbeams, each in their part making them feel that the elements of nature had combined to hold them fast in this love tryst.

As they recognized each other more fully and felt the sweet bonds drawing them together, the capricious breeze caught in its invisible hands a fold of the shimmering water, and threw it around them like a bridal veil, while the benevolent sun showered down upon them its golden benediction. She, realizing the meaning of this more than he perhaps, laughed softly, the first expression of joy

she had given since entering the glade. His hand clasped hers more tightly than ever, while he stooped and pressed upon her lips the seal of love, murmuring:

"At last the cross is lifted! The joy is mine."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WOODRANGER'S "CROSS" — BITS OF BIOGRAPHY

THOUGH the artist has painted his picture, he loves to linger over his work. He has put the greatest effort of his life into this masterpiece, and yet for that very reason he turns away from it reluctantly, stopping to add a little colour to the sunset, softening the tints of the clouds floating dreamily over the sky, touching and retouching the painting until what had seemed perfection at first proves there is nothing perfect. The architect plans his building, and its structure goes on under his critical supervision, until the work is declared complete. Still he lingers to add some new thought to his dream of grace and elegance. So it is in every craft and calling. He who is sincere in his work is never willing to consider it finished.

What is true of the others is none the less true of the story-teller, and while this simple tale has really been told past its crisis of interest, I would fain linger over its web. I would picture more clearly to your mind's eye that, to me, grandly beautiful life of him who has figured as the central char-

acter in this series of stories, Taconica the Forester, Wiscowan the Wanderer, the Woodranger — Alick MacDonald.

His was a singular story of sacrifice and of silent suffering, proving the verity of the old adage that "Truth is stranger than fiction." There is no gainsaying the fact that the MacDonalds were a bold, honest, headstrong family, and like people of this trait were strong in their likes and dislikes, often going to extremes in their conduct. A careful reading of the accounts given by different ones connected with the troubles that fell upon certain members as told in the previous books of this series will afford a fair inkling of the truth.[1] The wrongs heaped upon Robert MacDonald, which overshadowed his life, could not otherwise than have aroused all the deep-rooted passions of his nature, and embittered his whole life. These indignities were reflected upon his son, Alick, who committed the grave mistake of trying to take personal vengeance upon their enemies. Happily he repented of this action before he had directly performed any wrong, but he was so complicated in a plot formed to check the flight of Parson MacGregor's flock while it was on its way to America that he was obliged to seek safety in the mountains of his native place.

[1] See "The Woodranger," Chapter XIII.; "The Young Gunbearer," Chapter XVII.; "The Hero of the Hills," Chapter VIII.

There he was found by Archie McNiel, as described in "The Woodranger," when the two, both labouring under great excitement and misapprehension, fired shots which each believed killed the other. Then followed exile and concealment for both.

To add to the burden of his sorrow, young Alick MacDonald learned that his wife had been induced to go to America, which was then the Mecca of many dreams dreamt by the oppressed people of the British Isles. Hither to New England he came, and soon found his father living at Namaske, but such complications had arisen concerning his own situation that he hesitated about making himself known for a time. He did go far enough to clear Archie McNiel of any unfortunate complicity in matters of which he did not care to speak. Believing Mary, his wife, was dead, and that his daughter was well cared for and happy with her grandfather, he resolved to bear his burden in silence and unknown. Becoming known as the "Woodranger," he was enabled to remain near to those in whom he was interested without avowing his identity.

Later, when he found that Mary, unconscious of any wrong-doing, was the wife of another, his loyalty of silence became as fixed as the stern nature of a MacDonald could make it. She was now the happy helpmeet of a worthy man, and he was the last person on earth to enter the fold. Thus, year

by year, he roamed the forests, bearing his cross with wonderful patience, and endearing himself to all who came to know him. He, in the last hours of his father, when the stern, embittered life was drawing to its close, confessed himself, and the latter was made happy by the knowledge.

Now, after more than thirty years of silent waiting, he found her free to return to his kind protection, and I am sure the reunion was the sweeter for the long separation borne with so much of meekness and resignation. It is pleasant to record that over their pure lives fell no further shadow. Still in middle life, for even he was not as old as he has often impressed us, living to a good old age, many years of contentment awaited them.

Now and then the old spirit of restlessness, which had been too long developing to become wholly subdued, would o'ermaster his home-love, and again he shouldered "Old Danger" to roam the forest, communing in his simple faith with nature. Then, too, when the silence of New England's first independence won by the fall of Ticonderoga was broken by the guns of Lexington, he was among the foremost to hasten to Bunker Hill. A few months later he was following Arnold in his memorable march through the wild white woods of Maine to the rock of Quebec; and, in due time, he was with his old comrade, Stark, at Bennington. Some

of these adventures, sometime and somewhere, I hope to describe, but they do not belong here. So we bid him, kindly, reluctantly, a tender good-bye, while there comes softly to us his own parting words to Alex Briant and his fair bride:

"Aweel, now's me, life has many paths winding hither and yon, and the truest o' these is the unsigned trail o' love, whither I follow like a child."

Of the other characters who have figured somewhat prominently in these "Woodranger Tales" some may care to know a little of their following careers. To these I would say briefly that Major Robert Rogers, to whom belongs a larger meed of praise than the historians of those days have seen fit to credit him for the success of the English arms in the Seven Years War, which culminated in a period of peace for the English colonies, performed the closing act by receiving the sword of the French commander in the West, then the territory about the Great Lakes, soon after the capture of Quebec. Soon after the close of the war he went to England, where he was received with special honours, and he devoted considerable of his time to writing of his personal adventures and accounts of the situation in America. At the breaking out of the Revolution, from his recent associations with the English, Washington mistrusted his fidelity to the cause of the colonists, and offended by his treatment he

joined the British army, though he did no great amount of fighting against those with whom he had been in comradeship years before. His fame eclipsed by these mistakes, which were not wholly his own, he died in England an exile from those he had known and loved in his younger years.

William Stark, the beau-ideal of a Ranger, led a company of the New England men under Wolfe to the height of Quebec upon that memorable September morning when Montcalm was surprised by the audacious English commander and his forces put to rout by that charge upon the Plains of Abraham which changed the fate of New France. Captain Stark fought at the head of his gallant followers close by Wolfe, and he was one of the four to bear him from the battle-field after he had received his death-wound. At the close of the war he returned to his home full of honours, to take up again the peaceful pursuits of a farm life, until the breaking out of the Revolution, which again called him to arms. Like Rogers he was driven to espouse a cause in which he did not believe, to fall early in the war.

I wish I could tell you more than I can of the life of his boon companion on many a hunt and war-trail, Sergeant Beau de Bien, for I must confess I have a strong admiration for the faithful fellow. He was a prime favourite with all of the Rangers,

and the importance with which his services were considered is shown by the fact that his master drew for him the rations and pay allowed the men. He lived to a ripe old age, and though he was never heard to boast of his deeds, he was always looked upon as a hero.

The history of John Stark is too well known to be repeated here. Like his brother William, he showed that a good soldier could be a useful citizen in times of peace. Then, when the alarm spread through Northern New England that the enemy were again threatening them by the way of the "Grand Pass," he girded on his sword, and at the head of the brave men of the Merrimack Valley, many of whom had followed him in the days of Rogers' Rangers, he stemmed the tide of invasion upon the field of Bennington. He also did good service at Trenton and elsewhere. The war over, he returned to his home at Namaske, where he lived honoured and respected for many years.

Philip, the friendly Sokokis, ever maintained a warm regard for the Starks, and he supplemented his faithful service in the war which decided the fate of his race in New England by serving throughout the Revolution as a soldier and scout under the cause of liberty. The war over, though he continued to make his home in the north, he made it a regular practice to visit once a year the English

town upon the intervales of the Saco River, which had sprung up near the site of the Indian encampment where his father once ruled as chieftain of his race.

Ben Browne served through the war with credit to himself, accompanying William Stark upon the Quebec expedition, and when the struggle was over he returned to his home, where he lived many years in peace and contentedness. It was from stories that he told to his children, and which were handed down in the family as memories of those trying days, that I have gleaned many of the incidents connected with this tale of his services with Rogers' Rangers.

Alex Briant, with his good wife, who was once known as the Princess of the Horican, made them a home in the valley of the Hudson, where their descendants live to-day. Lieutenant Berne lived with his daughter, and though he had begun to feel the infirmities of his years, he served as an officer in the Revolution, doing efficient work and winning for himself the distinction of "the white horse colonel" in the Battle of Saratoga.

The years that have flown since those stirring days have brought many changes to the "Grand Pass." Where Rogers' Rangers went upon their perilous scouts peaceful hillsides yield their products of nature, and where the marching columns

of armies moved, the summer tourists follow a broad highway to modern castles of sightseekers. Where the English camped and the French bivouacked, are now the sites of thrifty towns, and their battle-fields are now pleasure-grounds. Where fleets of hostile powers ploughed their course through crystal-like waters, stately steamers of pleasure-travel glide majestically up and down the "Grand Pass." Forts William Henry and Ticonderoga are possibly as invulnerable in their ruins as they proved in their zenith of glory, for neither met the expectations of their builders. To-day they are picturesque spots where the historian and antiquarian love to linger, living over in imagination olden times. The noble pine that stood like a sentinel at the Lookout for centuries, looking calmly down upon the warring races, sleeps in its rocky grave, while the ruined heap, overgrown with vines and moss-carpeted, that once formed the lonely dwelling of the outlawed French nobleman and his family, is looked upon by the stranger as the remains of some fortification in the days of the French and Indian wars.

THE END.

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